

Awakening in the 21st Century

Interview with a “garden path cleaner”

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I have finished the job...

Question 1: *So, you claim to have realised the ultimate goal of Buddhism? This is a very bold claim. What does that actually mean?*

Answer 1: It means that I'm free and that I finished the job of transforming myself to the extent that I don't experience any more any of the three poisons, greed, hatred and delusion or craving, aversion and ignorance. I'm living in total equanimity all the time and experiencing happiness most of the time.

Question 2: *So are you therefore entirely free from suffering?*

Answer 2: Yes I am. I have removed the cause of suffering which is craving. Craving for sensual pleasures, aversions, craving for becoming and for not-becoming. All these cravings are gone so I'm not experiencing any suffering. It's really amazing to realise that suffering goes as soon as craving goes. I now have absolutely no fear about anything and no delusion and no ignorance of any kind. So I'm not experiencing suffering.

I am experiencing situations with the three types of feelings which are pleasant, unpleasant and neutral but none of them are causing me to go to any kind of reaction other than enjoying the pleasant situations when they occur, just bearing with the unpleasant situations when they occur and having no aversion for them. The beauty is that as soon as they end, these unpleasant situations, then I'm in the next moment whatever it is, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, whatever. So I'm moving from moment to moment in peace.

Question 3: *Why don't we hear such assertions nowadays? Doesn't modern Buddhism teach how to reach this goal? Do people nowadays achieve it?*

Answer 3: About the people not achieving it I'm not sure. I hope there are other people on earth currently who are achieving this state. The issue with Buddhism, all kinds of Buddhism, from the *Mahāyāna* tradition to the *Theravada* tradition is that they are not focusing on the central task that the Buddha tells us to achieve, which is to abandon cravings. Most of these traditions are just focusing on one thing which is meditation. Although they don't say it, they have the implicit belief that just by meditating you are going to succeed abandoning these cravings.

If people are only meditating they are not doing the core work of transforming themselves to achieve the end of suffering by the end of cravings. And I'm saying that because it's very clear to me that meditation is only a tool and yes you can achieve some pleasant moments while you are meditating but what counts is what's happening in your daily life when you come back to your normal life and that's usually what is happening is that you come back with your hindrances that you may have temporarily suppressed while meditating during long retreats. Your hindrances are coming back which means that you have not abandoned them.

I have found that in all Buddhist traditions they are not focusing on the task which is the task associated with the second truth of the Buddha. The cause of suffering is craving and the task is to abandon craving. I have not found anywhere any teaching by any teacher, lay or monastic, any teaching about how to practically use the eight-fold-path (8FP) for achieving this task of abandoning craving. This is the thing I have discovered for myself, how to use the 8FP for that purpose.

I can be at peace with anybody on earth and most importantly I can be at peace with myself...

Question 4: *So as you said, you have achieved this transformation. So how did you become a self-transformed, awakened person? Did it happen gradually or did the transformation occur all at once.*

Answer 4: It happened gradually yes. There is no magic wand that somebody can use on you or yourself to find yourself suddenly free from craving. It is a progressive work. We are creatures of habit. We have developed, I would say during the first seventeen years of our life, a lot of habits as the result of some experiences of life and usually these habits are not very skilful. That's the layer of suffering that we are adding to a situation by going into anger and into fear, whatever.

I have found 128 different flavours of aversions and fears (see Annex 3). So I've come to realise that these habits that we have developed need to be replaced by new habits. This has to be done for each one of them. First we have to discover for ourselves what are the unskilful habits that we have in us and make a conscious effort to replace them by something more practical. But before being able to do that we have to look at the root of the thing, which is why do we have these habits that we have developed. It's because we have experienced, in particular, unpleasant situations in life that we call traumas, little, medium and big traumas and we have reacted to them in an unskilful way. It was totally unconscious but we could not do better at the time.

Now, as an adult, we can review these situations and come to realise, that we have to make peace with the past. It is what the Buddha said in one of the *suttas*, my favourite *sutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta*: "Dry up the remains of your past". When I read this statement some years ago it really struck a chord in me because I had succeeded to dry up one aspect of my past which was my relationship with one very important person in my life which was my mother with whom I was angry for the first 55 years of my life. On this occasion not through Buddhism but through a psychological process. I succeeded by just working on myself, transforming my relationship within me with my mother. After just five days I was at peace with her, which is an amazing thing.

That was the thing which gave me the level of confidence that I used later on to continue transforming myself, having had such an amazing success of being at peace with my mother, within me, without having to involve her in this process that gave me a huge level of confidence that, yes, I can be totally at peace with the past. Now I can be at peace with anybody on earth and most importantly I can be at peace with myself. So when I applied this process to be at peace with everybody and ultimately with myself that became one very important tool for reaching the goal.

I integrated the teachings of the Buddha into this activity and discovered how to use the first six components of the 8FP for achieving the goals of (1) making peace with the traumas of the past (2) making peace with the people (including oneself) we had issue with in the past (3) replacing unskilful reactions to pleasant and unpleasant situations by skilful reactions.

It was a blank moment (on my unique experience of stream entry)...

Question 5: *I also want to ask another thing now. Namely traditional Buddhist accounts say that awakening is accompanied by some special transformation moments connected with certain stages like stream-entry or the ultimate attainment of the final stage of an awakened person. Did you experience some special transformative moments on your path? I mean, a moment that brought some fundamental changes in you. Do you recall something like that from your past life?*

Answer 5: On the path to awakening there are, to my understanding now, because having read almost all *suttas*. In the original teaching there are two stages of awakening. They are stream-entry and *arahantship*. In these two stages there are things that are happening within you which you notice. Something is happening in your brain which makes you realise, "Oh there is something that has happened within me". It happened to me when I reached stream-entry and that is what gave me the clear signal, "Something had happened in me," and then I had a confirmation later on, that, yes that was the realisation of stream-entry.

It was on May 20, 2014. I was doing a retreat on my own for 10 days. During this retreat, as I always do when I do self-retreat, I did a combination of practice of meditation, and practice of studying the *dhamma* through various texts and sometimes listening to *dhamma* talks and so on. At that time I was reading a book that I am not particularly interested in because it's not part of what we call the Early Buddhist Texts, the *Abhidhamma*. For some reason I was reading the part of the *Abhidhamma* that discusses the stages of awakening and the moments when you cross a stage.

After reading this I went for a walk in the forest near the centre where I was doing the retreat. While I was walking, not thinking about anything specific, maybe pondering the things I'd just read, I suddenly got a little bang in my head. I stopped walking. In fact it was not a bang, it was a blank moment, my mind became suddenly blank, just for a moment. So I stopped walking, and noticed that everything seems to be working okay, so I restarted my walk. Few steps after that I got this realisation "Oh, I think I crossed a stage".

This blank moment occurred again for the following four mornings. I had this blank moment at the time of waking up. Then I was confused as I was taking each blank moment as a stage of awakening. At that time I was believing that there were these four stages of awakening: stream-entry, once-returner, non-returner and *arahant* (now I believe there are only two stages). So I was counting. OK first stage when I was waking, then second stage the morning after, then third stage, then fourth stage, then I got another one! So I was confused. It's only several weeks later on that I had some insight, because I had nobody to talk to about these things; there was nobody I could discuss it with, so I had to formulate an understanding of what happened. I came to realise that what occurred in the following mornings, was the consolidation of the stream-entry event. Something happens during the night when you are reprocessing things. You get a signal when you wake that there was the end of some process that has occurred in the mind.

At the end of that period I had the essential realisation: "Oh I have absolutely no doubts" which is one of the fundamental things that happens to stream-enterers. They have abandoned the first three fetters. The most important of the three is doubt, doubt about the *dhamma* and doubt about oneself being able to finish the job, to become an awakened person. The absence of doubt gave me the strong assurance that yes I have crossed the stage of stream-entry.

Question 6: *According to traditional Buddhist interpretation, crossing a stage like stream-entry is connected with jhāna. Did you experience any specific meditative jhāna at the time of attaining what you believe is stream-entry?*

Answer 6: Not at all! In fact at that time I was in the middle of the period where I was aiming, nowadays I call it craving, at reaching the *jhāna* as described in some *Theravada* tradition, in particular in the *Visuddhimagga*, and I was not succeeding at all at achieving this kind of *jhāna* (today I realise that this is not *jhāna* but either one of the *samāpatti* or rather *nirodha* as body and mind are said to be frozen in this so-called-*jhāna*).

I continued trying to achieve that for the following two years after stream-entry. I was doing regularly self-retreat for long periods, trying to achieve these things. And yes I remember reading in the *Abhidhamma* these associations between the four *jhānas* and the four stages of awakening. That's not what is found in the *suttas*. There is no such a thing. Crossing the stages of awakening does not happen while you are in *jhāna* at all.

I experienced the first *jhāna* as described in the *suttas*, not as described in the *Visuddhimagga*, two years later. That was on February 29, 2016, less than two years after stream-entry. At that time I had abandoned the intention to do the *jhāna* as described in the *Visuddhimagga*. Thanks to Leigh Brasington, one of Ayya Khema's students, I came to realise that it is possible to achieve *jhāna* as described in the *suttas*. My 1st *jhāna* happened in February 2016 so, for me, there was no connection between *jhāna* and the 1st stage of awakening which happened two years before.

After that I did a lot of study about stream-entry and came to realise that if somebody like the leper *Suppabuddha* who had never heard anything about the *dhamma*, just by listening to a talk by the Buddha and having a conversation with him, reached the stage of stream-entry, I realised that stream-entry has nothing to do with any realisation of meditative type and also having nothing to do with having abandoned yet cravings for sensual pleasures and aversions and fears. These abandonments come later. So stream-entry is, I would say, a pure cognitive event as result of abandoning delusion about the self, delusion about the value of rites and rituals, and delusion about the *dhamma*.

Explosion of *sukha* in my body (on my first experience of *jhāna*)...

Question 7: *Can you briefly say something about your first experience of jhāna?*

Answer 7: I came to realise that the *jhāna* as described in the *sutta*, particularly the first *jhāna*, contains two fundamental components: *pīti* and *sukha* which are joy and pleasure. You can call it happiness but it is pleasure and it is pleasure in the body. Most importantly, it means that you are totally functioning, body and mind. The entry into *jhāna*, the key for entering *jhāna* is having abandoned the five hindrances which in particular include craving for sensual pleasure and aversions and fears, as well as doubt, restlessness and remorse and sleepiness. I had no issue with doubt as I was a stream-enterer so there was no issue left with doubt for me. This fetter was already permanently gone. Restlessness and remorse and sleepiness and cravings and aversions were not present as I was really focusing on the practice of trying to attain this first *jhāna*.

I just had to experience *pīti* and *sukha*. Luckily I had *sukha* happening to me in my daily life, some months before. It was sometime in November or December the year before. So I was already experiencing *sukha* in some parts of my body, a pleasure that was coming from nowhere! Usually when you experience pleasure it's as result of taking an object from outside or having a contact with something and put it into your system and this gives you pleasure, for example a good food, or having a sexual relationship, these kind of things. In the case of *sukha* in the *jhāna* as well as in your daily life, it's a *sukha* that comes not as result of contact with an external object. So it's produced by your system, body and mind, without an external contact.

I had experienced *sukha* few months before so the item I was working on developing in me was joy, during this period of meditation retreat. Joy had been an issue for me for a long time because I had suppressed joy for many years due to all the traumas I received when I was young. So to express joy was a bit of a challenge. Joy is a mental thing while *sukha* is a physical thing. At that time in the retreat, I was doing some walking meditation and started to experience a bit of joy in my mind, so I said to myself, let's go back to sitting in the meditation hall.

For some unknown reason, I decided not to take my usual sitting posture on the cushion. I decided, ok I'm just going to investigate if I can bring joy while I'm just sitting on a chair and instead of sitting as I usually do on the front of the chair, my back not touching the back of the chair, my legs perpendicular to the body, I decided, no, just lean on the back of the chair, the feet extended in front, in a relaxing position, merely aiming having some joy in my mind. And then suddenly, bang, I got this explosion of *sukha* in my body, not in the part of my body where *sukha* usually starts which is the left thigh but this time it was in the right thigh! It was a huge sensation of *sukha* that overwhelmed me. It was so pleasant, it was really amazing. It was a very intense moment experiencing the joy in my mind and the pleasure of *sukha* in this part of my body. Because this is what is described in the *suttas*, I knew I was in *jhāna*. I was in the first *jhāna*.

I woke up with a bang, a big bang in my head (becoming an arahant)...

Question 8: You described this unique experience connected with attaining the stage of stream entry. However there is something else we need to consider namely you claim to be an arahant but how do you know that you are an arahant because in the early Buddhist texts such an experience is usually accompanied by a very definite final knowledge. Usually we read descriptions of a particular early Buddhist, usually a monk, who states that what was to be done is done, the holy life is finished, there is nothing further for this state. So how can you be certain that you are an arahant? Did you have this kind undoubtable final knowledge? Was it a definite event like in the case of your stream entry?

Answer 8: It's a combination of things. I reached a stage, it was the end of August early September last year, 2019, where I was starting to become impatient. Thinking: "Is it finished?" I wanted this protracted work to be finished. I'd enough of working on transforming myself on this aspect and that one and now it's been months that I have finished with the 128 fears and aversions that I had in my spreadsheet that I was reviewing every month and it was months since I'd any issue associated with fears and aversions. I had been working diligently on cravings like the ones I mentioned about attraction to beauty and the relationship with food and other things. It was then that I thought, well I don't see anything else for me to work on. I'd exposed myself to as many possible situations in life for a long time, situations I could be not comfortable with to see if there was any button which was going to be pushed by someone in these kinds of situations to see if there was anything for me left to do, to work on. I reached a stage of saying okay, what's next, I have enough of that.

And then on the 10 of September I woke up with a bang, a big bang in my head. It was not scary at all because it reminded me of a similar event when I had the stream entry event that I had for several mornings I'd been waking up with this kind of thing. But this one was huge. I really had this big bang in the head. Could this be the sign? Something had happened in my brain which was the cutting of some connections between some areas of the brain such that there is no more any for example, craving which is going to occur from now on. I didn't notice straightaway some particular effect so I continued being on the lookout: "Would I get a confirmation that yes the job is done?" So I was expecting to have the kind of realisation like the Buddha had where while it was in the third part of the night while he was in *jhāna* four where he got this realisation: "Oh, I have finished, there is nothing left for me to do. I have destroyed the *āsavas*." He came to realise that while he was in *jhāna* four. I thought this is a good place for having this kind of realisation because in *jhāna* four you have a perfected *sati*-attention-mindfulness and you have total equanimity. So any information coming into your mind is purified from any sort of craving of course because you have already abandoned the five hindrances when you entered *jhāna*. Because I was now entering *jhāna* four for several weeks so I thought okay one day I will get the confirmation while in *jhāna* four. But no it didn't happen that way.

There it's nothing left for me to do...

I went to see a monk at the monastery near by, with whom I could feel confident I could open a discussion about this knowledge. He knew about my previous stream entry event and entering *jhāna* one. He helped me at the time to come to realise: no, you have not yet finished the job, that there were still things to do. I had a discussion with him in general terms and I came out from this meeting with a phrase from him saying that: "Yes when you have finished the job you will know it. It will be totally obvious." So I was reassured that I didn't need to have somebody external to me to tell me that I had finished the job.

My concerns were following reading a *sutta* where the Buddha made *Sāriputta* realise that he had finished the job. *Sāriputta* was not able to realise it by himself. So I was concerned: "Do I need somebody to tell me

that I have finished the job?" Anyway the event that gave the information was: a dream! A dream just before waking up one morning. I had this dream where I was entering this place, not sure exactly what it was, and I found there this guy, an Indian guy. I didn't see his face but I knew he was an Indian. Next moment I found myself sitting on the lap of this guy, cuddling to him in his bosom and crying feeling a mixture of relief and joy. I woke up and came to realise that I was in the bosom of the Buddha and was crying of joy, I have finished the job, I'm free, I'm like him. That was my moment of realisation that yes, I have done the job.

From that moment I monitored everything happening into me, my reactions to any situation and I came to realise that the phrase, "There it's nothing left for me to do," was true for me. Now I experience the three types of pleasures listed in a *sutta* (SN 36.31) which are: the pleasures of the five senses, the pleasure of *jhāna* and most importantly the pleasure of knowing that there is nothing left to do, that *nibbāna* has been realised. This third type of pleasure I have it so regularly in my life now. Regularly I mentally pinch myself saying: "Yes, it's done! There is nothing left for me to do!" It is such a relief of knowing that there is nothing left for me to do.

You know my favourite *sutta*: "Dry up the remains of your path. Have nothing for your future." That's where I am, I have absolutely nothing for my future because I have no plans to do anything, to achieve anything other than enjoying this freedom and contributing to the world as much as I can from now on. I have the same deep intention to help and to be a witness that, yes, it is possible to become an *arahant* and in particular as a lay person. For years I kept hearing this monk stating that if you are not a monastic you cannot become an arahant. I'm very pleased to have proved him wrong. Meanwhile I am not interested in giving a title to myself so the word *arahant*, a worthy person, is not that important to me. It took me a little while to accept that okay I can call myself an arahant but most importantly when I talk to myself I say: "I have finished the job!"

I grew up with no place of refuge....

Question 9: *Thank you. Now maybe we can focus a little bit on what get you to that stage because you already said that the crucial element was "drying up the remains of the past". So can you maybe now tell us about your past. Tell us about your background and how this contributed to where you are now. For example, tell us something about how it all started, about your youth.*

Answer 9: It all started with a lot of suffering. I grew up in Western Europe, just after the Second World War, in a very strict Catholic family. I was the number three in a family that became a family with seven children. My parents were very strict. When I did the process I mentioned before, of making peace with my mother, I realised I was given an implicit role as we are often given in a family situation, we don't know it's given to you but it's implicit. I was given the scapegoat role. I was always the one responsible when something was going wrong and I was always the one punished. The punishments at the time were both physical and mental, by both parents.

I grew up with no place of refuge. I had no idea about where to go and communicate with someone to help me about anything in life. In fact I learned to suppress a lot of my emotions, particularly the negative ones like becoming angry because of some situations. If I was becoming angry about something that my parents did to me I was getting more punishment. So I suppressed a lot of emotions including the one I mentioned before which is joy. My education was all about intellectual education and always about the future. "Think about your future!" So the importance of being happy and the joy of the moment were absolutely not emphasised in my environment.

Then at the age of nine I was put in a boarding school with my two oldest brothers whom I was not seeing while in the boarding school. This school was run by Catholic priests and at that time it was very rigorous. I was punished all the time. I was spending recess times, standing in a corner instead of playing with my friends. And same for the weekends, so I spent the whole first seventeen years of my life being under the thumb of a parent or a teacher. I also had a number of traumatic events, in relationship in particular with my mother, which had a dramatic impact on my life and caused me to have a very low self-esteem. And in many regards, particularly from the sexual point-of-view, one of the consequences was that I couldn't have children. That was a big trauma in my life and caused me many difficulties with my first wife.

I've come a long way, having accumulated enough suffering, as the Buddha says, in order to have the incentive to find a way out. Is there a possibility to be happy in life, to be free from suffering as he was also looking? Fortunately, when I look at it now, all these traumas that I had, were not as crushing as I thought they were at the time. I could eventually make peace with them later on. But I carried them with me for at least fifty years of my life. I reached at stage when at the age of twenty-seven I was totally desperate. I was so negative, I was suicidal and I tried to kill myself by swallowing all the pills which were given to me for my depression. Luckily I was given a stomach wash that saved me. So I went really very low. To attempt to kill yourself, you have to be really desperate.

Question 10: *Yes. So there were much negative elements and much suffering connected with your upbringing but do you think there was anything any positive influence from them for example. Being raised in such and such atmosphere, Catholic environment. Was it purely negative?*

Answer 10: Of course there were a lot of positives. It's one of the aspect when you try to make peace with the people of the past, in particular with the people who were responsible for you when you were a child, usually your mother and father, then once you have dealt with your sufferings in the relationship then you can look at other aspects of the relationship and then discover there were some positive aspects.

I came to realise there are many qualities of my mother and of my father that I took on board and I admire them for these qualities. The commitment of my parents to a spiritual development has been very important to me. I came to realise there is something possibly more than just trying to be happy, having a good time by drinking, having a girlfriend or whatever. I always had this quest for something more than just material things for making me complete. I abandoned the concept of God early on in my life, in my early twenties.

When I discovered the *dhamma* I was at the time forty-six. I really embraced the concept that it is not an external thing, an external person who is going to come and save me. This concept of saving became totally foreign to me and for me was a cop out. Instead I came to realise that I am responsible for my happiness and that was an important realisation in my life. So definitely there is a lot of good things that came from my upbringing and I recognise that the education I received gave me the chance to become an engineer and to have a good income, a good working life, successful career and also the ability to open up to any subject in life and to study and to embrace knowledge.

Intellectual curiosity was an important aspect acquired from my parents and also some specific human qualities. I always admired my father attitude towards others. He was a manager in a company, and he had an attitude towards the people who were working for him that I really admired. This is what I also took on board. So definitely a lot of good things but they didn't give me the joy of life which I found so important to have. In fact it took me 71 years to be able to reconcile the little child with the intellect and the spiritual self. I just did it last year and I did it through a psychological process called EMDR. For 71 years of my life the little child was not confident and was not carrying me for bringing me some joy. The joy I was talking about which was lacking in my life. Now this little child is fully integrated into me and he is carrying me and giving me this energy that I'm happy to have now, of wanting to have fun and recognise the quality of many aspects of life which were denied to me when I grew up.

Question 11: *Okay so let's go back to this moment when you try to commit suicide. Your suffering was at very peak. From what you said earlier there were still many years until you would discover Buddhism and even more years until Buddhism started working for you. So did you remain for that time at this high level of suffering or did some improvements happen in your life and there was some development or some progress. In the period from your attempted suicide until the positive changes connected with Buddhism? How will you summarise this period?*

Answer 11: This period lasted 20 years. During this period I started to become a bit more confident about myself. In particular finishing studying engineering while I was actively working. For seven years going to university at night and weekend while I was very involved in my work. Achieving this gave me a bit of a boost in self confidence. Also success at work. Also, although my relationship with my 1st wife was not going very well, it happened that we went away from the country we were born to work in the Middle East, and there I started to have girlfriends. This gave me a bit of confidence as in this aspect I had a very low self-esteem. I started to experience a bit of the pleasures of life here and there. But I think I was always on the quest for something else because I knew, that's not the ultimate. Having a good sex, having a good drink, is not going to do it. Luckily I didn't go into any addiction other than smoking. I didn't try drugs, I didn't become an alcoholic. I was not drinking much, enjoying a drink here and there definitely but not to the extreme of abandoning myself to alcohol. I never tried drugs. So my only addiction was smoking which I didn't realise at the time was an addiction until I tried to abandon it which was a bit of a challenge but a very interesting story.

Quitting smoking...

Question 12: *So maybe you can tell us more about this. How did you become able to drop smoking?*

Answer 12: I started smoking very young. My father was smoking and there was incentive around me for smoking. I was maybe 16 or 17. By the age of 20 I was smoking 20 cigarettes a day. After a while I was becoming unhappy with the situation not because I knew the dangers, at that time we didn't know that cigarette was such an addictive thing and is so bad for our health, as at that time we didn't know that because of the power of the tobacco companies. But I was not happy for one thing, is that I came to realise that every time I was under pressure about anything my first action was to take a cigarette and give myself a bit of comfort. I was not happy with the idea that I could give a signal to other people about my weakness in some situations. Because one of the things I was always afraid when I was growing up, is that my mother was telling me that she knew what I was thinking and for me to have somebody being able to know what I am thinking was a big aversion, a big fear. So I was having that fear that people knew that when I am under pressure I am reaching for a cigarette.

I had succeeded to stop smoking for a while when I was living in Europe but it didn't last because when I went to the Middle East I was near a friend who was smoking all the time. I didn't know at the time that passive smoking is like smoking. So naturally from passive smoking I went back to smoking. I continued smoking for the following six years. Until I fell in love with this woman who would later on become my second wife. I came to realise that I had to stop. By the fact that I was fed up with this addiction and also because she was not happy having a smoker near her. I was living in the Middle East and she was in Europe at the time. I decided: "Okay I'm going to stop and for good this time."

For some reasons that I still don't know today, I decided: "I'm going to stop smoking in two months time when I'm going to take that plane to visit my girlfriend in Europe." I set up myself for this task of quitting smoking by having my last smoke in the plane after my dinner before going to sleep. I will have my last cigar there and so for the following two months I continued smoking as normal and I was unconsciously preparing myself for this event. My only concern during this period was, "What will I do with my hands after I quit smoking?" because a smoker is always busy with something in his hands. The second concern was "What will I do with this beautiful silver lighter I was given for Christmas?" A lighter that was making a

very nice click! Anyway, here arrives the night where I took the plane and at the time we could still smoke in a plane so I had my dinner and I had my last little cigar. I went to sleep. Woke up. Had my breakfast and of course I got a craving for a little cigar. I was not supposed to have it but I started to bargain with myself: "You are still in this plane. So let's consider it is still part of the deal. It's okay because it's going to be the last one". So I lit the cigar, took one puff but the taste was so bad that I could not continue smoking it and I extinguished it.

For a while I was very confused. How come that the same cigar that was so pleasurable last night has now such an horrible taste? I took me a while to realise what happened. I had set up myself by telling my system, body and mind that from that moment in life this thing is not for me anymore. I had prepared my body to react when I had this first puff of the cigar which I was not supposed to have. So my body had a reaction to that. My mind was set up in such a way that my body reacted to that situation. That was the first time in my life where I realised how much body and mind are affecting each other.

That was a very important realisation for the things which happened later on when I was transforming myself: how much the body is central to the *dhamma*. This is one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and the *dhamma*. In Christianity you have this concept that the body is impure, that we have to be afraid of it and the separation between body and mind, the dichotomy of the Descartes model of body and mind of a human being. This dichotomy is not there and that's the beauty of the *dhamma* with the concept of the five *khandhas* where you see that everything overlaps and the entanglement of body and mind as a set of processes.

The event of quitting smoking was a very important moment in my life, by realising that if you put in place your intention for long enough then it will have an effect, and that's what happened to me at that time. So I could apply it later on to the other aspects of transforming myself, abandoning bit by bit the bits that I wanted to abandon. I knew I could do it, because if I did it for the cigarette then I can do it for anger, fear, whatever.

Every moment of life is an opportunity...

Question 13: *Just a couple of moments ago you mentioned that gradually you were able to overcome your shyness and be more successful with women. From the traditional Buddhist point of view celibacy is emphasised and is praised as very valuable for spiritual achievement and self transformation. So looking back from the perspective of your transformation at this period of engaging with women did you consider it as a negative element of your life or did you see some positive value in it as something that may have allowed you to become more active and let go of certain things? Or would it be better not to have this aspect of life entirely?*

Answer 13: It's all about strategy. There are moments in life where you need to indulge in some activities that will bring strength in some aspects of your psyche. There are other moments in life where it is better to avoid a certain number of things. I was not conscious of what I just said now at that time, but for me unconsciously having relationships with several women, not that many, only few of them, was important to develop a level of confidence that I needed to have as a man. I have never been dominating in my relationship with anybody but I needed to build some confidence. I always knew implicitly that having received a lot of suffering by a woman, my mother, I was going to receive a lot of healing from other women. The women who were giving me love and sexual pleasure was important for that. So I have absolutely no regret about this period of my life. Anyway it was not a huge indulgence as I was not going from woman to woman just to prove myself. No, I was just experiencing a bit of peace and happiness and pleasure. So there is no issue there.

Later on in life it's quite all right at some stages in your development to abandon these things. But the funny thing is that you don't need to abandon them forever. That's a fundamental difference between a monastic and a lay person like me. A monastic makes a commitment, at least for the time they are monastics, not to have, in particular, any sexual relationship of any kind including self pleasure. And if they are monastic all their life then it will be like that for the rest of their life. For a lay person it is not the same. One of my favourite phrases is "that every moment of life is an opportunity" for something. Enjoying the pleasure of life is not an issue at all. The issue is craving. When I speak of craving it is indulgence. Too much of something is definitely of the nature of craving. Experiencing the five physical senses pleasure is not a distraction. In fact there is a *sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 36.31) that clearly says about the three types of *sukha*-pleasure. The *sukha* of the five senses, the *sukha* of *jhāna* and the *sukha* of *nibbāna*, of the end of the path. None of them is to be rejected. Once you have finished with your cravings you can completely come back to enjoying the sensual pleasures of the five senses (eye, nose, ear, tongue and the body). There are no issues there because you have no cravings.

I have absolutely no regret about each and every moment of my life...

Question 14: *OK. Let's consider a hypothetical situation that you wouldn't experience any success with women or any relationship with women and after your traumatic experiences from your childhood and young adulthood would it still be possible for you to achieve this transformation or; do you think that these experiences allowed you to come to peace with certain parts of yourself or eventually let go of all of this? I mean if there hadn't been these experiences wouldn't there have been a some sort of regret which would prevent you from the ultimate letting go?*

Answer 14: If I didn't have any success with women I'm sure it would have been more difficult for me to develop some self confidence. In fact I have always been surprised that I could attract women. I always thought I was unattractive and was really surprised when my wife told me that I was handsome. I do now realise that I am attractive to some women and I'm ok with that.

Over the years I have had pleasant experiences with women. An important aspect is that I had no attachment to these experiences. Very quickly I came to realise that there is nothing ultimate there. There is pleasure from having a good time including sex with a woman, having a good drink, having a good meal, and so on. But all these things are transient, with no lasting effects and to reproduce them is hard work. It's hard work to have good sex, or a good meal or whatever sensual pleasure you want to experience. That's one the problem with life: living a life of pleasure is hard work. I knew that putting my energy into these things will not fulfil an ultimate goal such as a lasting happiness.

I didn't know then what ultimate thing I should be looking for nor did I have the concept of lasting happiness and the possibility of being free from suffering because this concept does not really exist in Christianity. Anyway I have absolutely no regret about each and every moment of my life when I review them today. Every moment of my past became something helpful for allowing me to be free today.

In order to be free you need to be free from something. It's not freedom in a general sense it has to be freedom from something. You are free from the sufferings of the past, from the fears for the future. You are free from the cravings, from one aspect or another, in particular craving for being eternal (in the *dhmma* terminology: craving for becoming). But you had to have been through some of that, you have to have experienced a bit of suffering, a bit of craving in order to know that the ultimate freedom will be the freedom from that. So I've experienced a bit of pleasure here and there and I have absolutely no shame and guilt around that.

Encountering Buddhism...

Question 15: *Now we must come back to one important point because so far when describing your past life Buddhism was not part of it so how did you come to know Buddhism? What form of Buddhism did you try out?*

Answer 15: I discovered Buddhism in 1993. Totally by luck by doing a retreat, a weekend retreat which was run by a Tibetan Buddhist group. The teacher was a lay person and he was pretty good so we became interested in Buddhism and we decided to join this group and attend a weekly evening session where he was presenting the *dhamma* as the *Mahāyāna* Gelugpa Tibetan tradition.

I became very interested in this because it was giving me a totally different point of view about life. At the beginning many concepts were quite strange to me and it was difficult understanding them, but the beauty of it is that very quickly I came to realise that there was nothing to believe in this teaching. It's all about understanding and practicing and the whole thing has to make sense to you. You are advised to challenge any concept which is given to you and that's something I really liked compared to my Catholic upbringing where you just had to believe in things and if you didn't believe that you are going to hell. This concept was not there in the *dhamma* so this was a very important thing to me.

With my wife we stayed with this group for 10 years and we were quite committed. But there were several aspects that they have in this tradition which were a bit of a challenge. One of them in particular, was the relationship with the Buddha as this tradition presents him as an out-of-this-world person, not really a normal human being. That was one aspect that I didn't like because I was suddenly having a relationship with someone I could not relate to. Same type of situation I had in Christianity where Jesus is a god so he is not a human being like me so how can I relate to his guy? That was one aspect in the *Mahāyāna* tradition that I didn't like and then there was a lot of rites and rituals which I also didn't enjoy. I was back into some type of religion and I was not looking for a religion. I was fundamentally looking for answers to the big questions of life. What is the meaning of all that? Why am I here?

One day my wife found out that there was another group in another tradition, the *Theravada* tradition. And we decided to do a pilgrimage to India with this group. And this was a turning moment for me because when we were in places where the Buddha had been, the monk who was running the pilgrimage was opening a book and reading some teachings of the Buddha associated with the place where we were. So I was asking people around me: "What is this book he is reading from?" "It's the *suttas*." And me: "What's that?"

After 10 years in Buddhism I didn't know about the *suttas*. I didn't know about the original teachings of the Buddha! So as soon as I was back home I bought the *Majjhima Nikāya* set of *suttas* which was maybe not the best that I should've started with but later on I progressively accessed all the *suttas*, the 11800 *suttas* that I think exist. Within few years I read all of them. That was an amazing discovery for me because from that moment I was being able to verify any concept coming from any Buddhist tradition, I could pass it through the filter of the *suttas* to find out: "Is it really there in the *suttas* as a teaching of the Buddha?"

After 10 years in the *Theravada* tradition I came to realise that unfortunately this tradition as the *Mahāyāna* tradition has made some corruptions which prevent the *dhamma* from being as effective as it possibly was at the time of the Buddha. All the Buddhist traditions have transformed a practice into a set of religions. I don't need a religion. I need a practice to free myself as the Buddha did, to free myself from *dukkha*. None of these traditions are giving us a practical teaching how to do that. How to, step by step, realise the end of *dukkha* by abandoning craving. So what I feel is very sad in the world of the *dhamma*, these days, is that this fundamental, central aspect of the *dhamma* is lost.

Question 16: *So you feel that the modern Buddhist traditions don't teach how to remove craving, aversion, delusion?*

Answer 16: That's right, for them, although they don't say it, so it's implicit, it's going to happen one day if you do a good job at meditating; that's my interpretation of their teachings and for me that's what's one psychologist in the US, who is also a practitioner, calls "spiritual bypassing". You don't do the work that you need to do to transform yourself instead you spend time in meditation and try to achieve some mental states which will make you happy or calm but unfortunately this doesn't last because you are not dealing with the root of the problem which is your craving.

If you want to be awakened, experience pleasure...

Question 17: *So would you say that the absolute dominant approach in modern Buddhism which equates practice with meditation is all wrong?*

Answer 17: Yes. Meditation for me is a tool. It is a useful tool. And there are many forms of meditation of course. But the one which really interests the *dhamma* is the one that the Buddha rediscovered for himself after having been in the wrong for six years. By the way this is something I really enjoyed that, like me the Buddha-to-be was deluded, went on several wrong paths, made mistake for six years! He tried hard to do things which didn't work. That was not removing his suffering. Then he realised that he was deluded. And I was doing that. I was doing all these practices which were totally not successful in removing my *dukkha*. And luckily for him, the Buddha-to-be had an experience when he was young. He entered the first *jhāna*.

When he remembered this moment he asked himself, could this *jhāna* stuff be the way to awakening? Then he realised there was a potential issue there: in *jhāna* there is *sukha*, there is pleasure. "Should I be afraid of this pleasure?" Then he realised, I should not be afraid of this pleasure because this pleasure is not the fulfilment of a craving. It's just a pleasure, coming from within.

It is quite amazing to come to realise that the path to freedom is a path of pleasure. How could the Buddha say something like that? Because at his time the path to awakening was possibly through pain (see the Jains) or at least by avoiding pleasure. No! instead the Buddha said: "the path to awakening is pleasure". The sad thing is that this is not mentioned in the Buddhist traditions today. The *Mahāyāna* and the *Theravada* are not telling you that. They are not telling you that you have to experience pleasure in order to be awakened. Me, I am saying that: "if you want to be awakened, you should experience pleasure" but make sure you do so without craving.

Drying up the remains of your past...

Question 18: *How can we get, or achieve that pleasure in our daily life, if not from meditation? Traditional Buddhist teachings don't seem to offer much instructions how to achieve that today. There are some crucial elements missing from the traditional teachings. What did you find to be essential for transforming yourself?*

Answer 18: Pleasure, happiness is not something you do, something you practice directly, it is the byproduct of transforming yourself. The fundamental effort of transforming yourself is to make peace with the past. I came across, late in my practice, a *sutta* in the *Sutta Nipāta* where the Buddha is answering to one Brahmin: "Dry up the remains of your past". This resonated very strongly with me because some years before I had done this for one very specific thing which was to make peace with my mother.

Making peace within me with my mother (I didn't involve her in the process) had an absolutely amazing impact on me. First I had achieved something I thought I will never be able to achieve in my life time. Second I came to realise how much the past is impinging on the present and causing fear for the future. So being at peace with the past is essential. So much of what we do in our daily life is automatic. We have automatic reactions to situations in life that we have put in place early on in our life, not in a conscious way

but unconsciously. So now what we need to do is to undo these unconscious processes and replace them by something more skilful.

This replacement is the last stage of what I now define as the three stages of making peace with the past. The first stage of making peace with the past is to make peace with all the people that you have challenge with in your life: make a list of them (normally you should include yourself in this list), this is the 1st to-do list. When you make peace with one person you make peace with all the unpleasant events that occurred with that person. This is the second step. You do these two steps for all the people, one by one, from your list of difficult persons, ending by making peace with yourself. Then after that you can engage into transforming your unskilful reactions to pleasant and unpleasant situations in life by simply abandoning them; that takes time.

The first two steps can be done by using something like the process I used when I made peace with my mother which is a psychological process called the Hoffman process. That was a process that I learned through a week kind of retreat situation with a group of people surrounded by psychologists where we learn to make peace with our family of origin. I did at the same time make peace with my mother and with my father. Before starting this process, I was 55 as a time, I was for all these years of my life very angry, very resentful towards my mother and my father but particularly my mother.

It was amazing that in just five days I was totally at peace with them. I transformed my anger and resentment towards my mother into love. This happened without having any involvement with her. My father was not alive at that time. The process of transforming your self, the process of making peace with the past is a work within. When you have done that, then your relationship with each person will change dramatically, because the message you are sending is totally different to the one you were sending before.

After having done this process of making peace with my mother, I went back to Europe to see her, where she was at the time, and I was able to assess that she was ready to receive my love and give back to me the love she always had for me. That was an absolutely amazing moment for me to be able to exchange this unconditional love with someone on earth. And from that moment as I explained in a document I wrote about transforming yourself, when you transform yourself the world, your world transforms with you.

When I had peace and love within me for my mother, I didn't have to tell her more than just that: "I love you and I know that you always loved me". She responded to this very positively, not orally but just by her attitude. She knew that I wasn't not telling something which was not true because my whole self, body, facial expression, tone of voice were totally in tune with these words of unconditional love. From that moment and until my mother passed away eight years later on, our relationship had always been very constructive, very positive, full of love. She never ever gave me any trouble while she continued giving trouble to everybody around, my brothers, my sisters and everyone else. That is what I mean when I say transform yourself and your world transform itself with you.

I discovered this very powerful thing: making peace with the people of the past, with the events associated with them, when I made peace with my mother I was at the same time making peace with all the traumas I received in my childhood and teenage years with her, then what was left for me to do was to work on the unskilful reactions that I have developed at the time when I was living with her. This takes much more time! It took five days to make peace with my mother and all the events associated with her (if you are not at peace with these events then you are not yet 100% at peace with the person that you kind of still blame for these events) and it took me several years to abandon my unskilful reactions to situations.

Making peace with others through the eightfold path: developing a complete view...

Question 19: *Well so shall we go more into details about how you make peace with your mother or shall we focus on the subsequent stage of transforming your habits and your reactions to everyday occurrences resulting from the initial problems from your past? Do you think that first topic needs to be elaborated on?*

Answer 19: Yes. I think so. In order to make peace with people and with unpleasant events associated with these people, you need to do it by applying a process, now I do it by using the first six components of the Eightfold-Path that overlap with some of the aspects of the Hoffman process.

The first component of the 8FP is developing a view. I don't call it right view. In this case I translate the word *samma* as complete, so this component for me is developing a complete view. What happens is we usually have a very biased view about something. In my case I had a very biased view about my mother because every time I was thinking of her it was always about my resentment and the things I was not happy with. As a result of that I didn't and couldn't see the other aspects of the relationship. It's very important that the first step of the 8FP is there to help you develop a complete view about something. Because once you have developed a complete view about something then eventually you will be able to put in place intentions much more skilful much more related to this view compared to the intentions you have at the moment based on your biased point of view.

What I discovered is that in order to develop a complete view you need to be very creative in finding the different points of view that you are going to consider and analyse in great detail. Importantly when you look at one point of view you don't mix it with another point of view. For example before using approach when not at peace with my mother, when thinking of her, I was starting to say: "I'm not happy with this aspect of my past with her" and then in the same sentence I was saying: "But she's my mother. I should not be negative about her. I should love her" and so on. As a result of that merging of different aspects I was not going anywhere and not resolving anything. I was having a mixture of resentment and guilt and not having a clear view about the situation and could not put in place skilful intentions as result of that.

I discovered, the first time was through the Hoffman process, that, no, just look at one point of view then later on you'll look at other points of view. What is the most important point of view? It goes very well with the *dhamma*: look through the eyes of the first truth, look at your own sufferings in this relationship. Acknowledge your sufferings fully. This is a fundamental point. Acknowledge your sufferings fully and then later on you will be able to let them go. In order to acknowledge your sufferings it's something that you, and only you can do.

It's something that we would like to have in life when we think about the past, to have the person who caused us problems to come and say: "I'm so sorry and I apologise for this and that" but this will never happen. The people who cause some pain to other people don't really realise that they are doing such a thing. They are not able to put themselves in the shoes of the other and come and say: "I apologise". The second aspect is that one particular action from someone produces very different reactions for a group of people. In the end a person who is doing something cannot be held responsible for the reactions of everybody else which cause them to experience or not some *dukkha*. It's only oneself who is responsible for that. That's how we are creating our suffering. It is by our cravings or our aversions. Everyone has a different types and levels of cravings.

Acknowledging your suffering, the first step you do is in writing. It is important to do it by writing as this is very cathartic. It's like going to the toilet, it's emptying your system, body and mind from something that you have been carrying within you for too long and which is causing you so much trouble both mentally and physically. Write down in detail all the suffering that you have experienced with someone is very important. When you have finished writing that, sometimes it can take several hours and possibly days of writing all

the details because you are writing the events, the emotions in the body associated with them, the feelings that you had and may still have, the consequences that you consider these events have had in your life, past and present and all the fears and aversions that you have put into yourself as result of these events; it is very important to go into great detail about all that.

Once you're finished with all these unpleasant events of the past with this person, then you do a purification of that, I call it a *Puja* as called in the Tibetan tradition where you burn this document that you have written while you are making a commitment to yourself "No more negativities towards xyz" (xyz being the person you are dealing with in this process). I suggest to put the ashes into a pot plant at home so that when you pass near it you remind yourself: "Oh I am committed to have no more negativities towards xyz."

This is the first sub-step of developing a complete view. At this stage you have emptied your system by letting go the sufferings and hopefully started to make some peace with the person and the unpleasant events with them. That is only one aspect of developing a complete view. You should now be able to move sideways from the big tree which was hiding the rest of the forest. Your sufferings were hiding the rest of the forest of the relationship. Now you can look at other aspects, other trees in the forest. The next tree you're going to look at and write in great detail, will be: all the positive aspects of the relationship. For example in the case of my mother, if I am here today alive, it is because she fed me, and protected me against all sorts of danger which exist for a little boy, and more. Recognising all these good things is important. Next you go through your whole life and write down all the positive things which happened to you in this relationship. You write all these positive aspects in great detail and keep this document because hopefully, in the future, you will be able to add more and more good things. This is the second point of view to develop for developing a complete view.

Then you develop the third point of view. This one is also very important, most useful for opening your eyes and also your heart. It's now looking at the suffering, again the first truth of the Buddha, looking at the suffering of the other person. For example, in the case of my mother, I knew a lot about the things she was not happy about, the things that she was suffering about, as a little girl, as a teenager and later on in her adult life, for example losing her husband much too early, and more. So I knew a lot about my mother's suffering. When I wrote it down all in great detail I began to open my heart to her. It is a very important step because when compassion comes into you, into your heart not only does it heal the relationship but also helps healing your own suffering. Again this is a very important step and this paper you should keep because eventually if your relationship with the person improves then you will be able to listen more and more to their story. This person will eventually talk more about him or herself in much more detail and you will be able to add to your paper about their suffering and open your heart more.

The last aspect that I have found useful in developing a complete view in a relationship is to look at the negative impact of our actions in this relationship. In this regard you look at the three aspects of what we do as human beings: we think, we speak and we act. Everything starts in the thinking. Every time I was thinking negatively about my mother I was setting myself up for failure when preparing to have a contact with her. You soon recognise that having negative thinking about a person is not very skilful. Second aspect is speaking or not speaking. For example, for years I was avoiding having contact with my mother or sometimes my speaking to her was not very skilful. So writing all these things is a very useful thing to do. The third aspect is doing: not doing the right things or avoiding to do the right thing. Again you review your whole story with the person and you write with great detail all the things you are not happy with; what you have thought, said and done or not said or not done. When you have finished with the writing you do another *Puja*, another purification of all these by burning it while you are repeating "no more negativities towards myself" because you don't want to maintain shame and guilt as these emotions are totally counter productive. Instead you acknowledge that this was not very skilful, you are done with that and are committing to having no more negativities towards yourself in this regard because you are have ceased

doing these things. These ashes you put them into another pot plant in your house and every time you pass near this pot plant you remind themselves "Ah, Ah, no more negativities towards myself".

At the end of this process, with these four very separate points of view, you have developed a complete view about a relationship with someone else on earth. As a result, you have started to heal all the trauma associated with this person. And then you eventually become at peace, as it happened to me in my case with the most difficult person I had on earth. This gives you great confidence for the future as having made peace with the most difficult person then you are confident you can be peace with anybody else.

Making peace with yourself...

At the end of the day you would have to do the process for making peace with yourself because that's the most important person that you need to be at peace with because you are going to live with this person for the rest of your life so you better be at peace. Remembering what I discovered in at least 12 *suttas*, the Buddha before passing away said when it comes to take refuge you take refuge in yourself, and then you take refuge in the *dhamma* which is totally against what all Buddhist traditions are doing. They are asking people to take refuge in what is called the three jewels: the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*. That was done at the time of the Buddha for some good reasons but it is not what the Buddha said we have to do now. Now we have to take refuge in our self first and then in the *dhamma*.

If you want to take refuge in yourself then you have to be strong. You have to be a rock solid person and for that you have to transform yourself. So being at peace with the past includes being at peace with yourself.

The three-steps process which I started to explain with the first step which is to develop a complete view when you do it for yourself, I propose a slightly different approach where you look first at all the things you dislike about yourself. Again you should look at the way you think, the way you speak and the way you act. Write down on paper everything about the past and the present associated with these three aspects. Then the second point of view will be writing about everything you like about yourself, again about your thinking, your speaking and your actions. And the third aspect will be writing about all the suffering that you have created for yourself in your life.

When you do this last sub-step you had hopefully already finished with making peace with everybody else on earth and all unpleasant events you had with these people so for this sub-step, there remain only the sufferings created by you that you don't hold someone else responsible for. That is your unskillful reactions to situations in life that you had in the past and you still have today. For example becoming angry is definitely something which is optional and is a suffering that we add to an unpleasant situation. So it's of our own making and we are responsible for that. Having a certain number of fears, a certain number of aversions is the result of us creating our suffering due to our craving. Acknowledging all these elements of our psyche is very important because we want to be at peace with that.

To develop a complete view for making peace with ourselves I see these three aspects to be developed. You do a Puja with the papers (and put the ashes in the same pot plant you used for sub-steps four before) you have written for sub-steps number one and number three, the things you don't like about yourself and the sufferings that you have experienced as a result of your cravings and then again you commit yourself: "No more negativity towards myself". All this is about developing a complete view about something, in this case a relationship with someone or with yourself, this is only the 1st step of the transformative process.

Putting intentions in place and applying them...

There are two more steps in the process of transforming ourselves. Step number two is as per the 8FP: to put in place intentions. Putting in place intentions is important. As I mentioned before how I quit smoking, it made me realise the power of putting intentions in the back of my mind. When you set your intentions and reinforce them again and again then when a particular situation occurs, the corresponding intention will hopefully pop up into your consciousness and will remind you "oh, oh I am supposed to go that way instead of going the old unskilful fashion way".

For this second step, I have made a list of 26 skilful intentions (see Annex 1) which include a list of positive intentions as well as a list of intentions not to follow some coping behaviours. When I was in the process of transforming myself, I read these two lists regularly and progressively taking them all on board when I felt I was ready to make the commitment. These intentions were firmly into the back of my mind and reminded me all the time about the things I wanted to do from now on and for the rest of my life. This is the second step, putting in place the intentions.

The third step is to apply these intentions in our daily life. Again we look at the three aspects: thinking, speaking and acting. Again associated with the 8FP, the thinking is the most useful tool I have found which is to protect the mind against negativity which is called right effort in the 8FP. This has been a most useful tool because one thing which causes the most trouble to everybody is negative thinking and maintaining a state of unpleasant thinking in the mind can lead to depression. I was so depressed for so many years of my life. This is really one of the most painful thing that we experience in life: the unpleasantness of negative thinking.

The tool of the Buddha, to develop right effort, is very useful. I expanded right effort in a very practical way for protecting my mind against negative thinking based on the fact that we human beings can only think of one thing at a time. We move from thought to thought very quickly and at the time there is only one thing that we have in our consciousness. So if you have your mind occupied with something then the unpleasant thought will have no chance to occupy your consciousness. I used different methods for occupying my mind resulting in giving no chance for the unpleasant thought to occupy the mind. The technique I use which I discovered in the Tibetan tradition was reciting Mantra. In the Tibetan tradition it is called a mind protector. I don't use the kind of religious mantra written in Sanskrit or whatever language, I'm using a very simple technique which is just counting. I count: one, two, three four. If the unpleasant thought is really wanting to occupy my mind, just counting 1-2-3-4 may not be enough so I count 1-2-3-4, 3-2-1, 1-2-3, 2-1, 1-2, 1, 1, 1-2, 1, 1-2-3, 2-1, 1-2-3-4 and so on (sometimes I count that way from 1 to 10 and back) and I keep doing this kind of silly little thing which occupies my mind such that after a while the unpleasant thought says: "okay I give up, you don't want me in so I'm going away!"

A very important aspect of protecting the mind is not developing an aversion for the unpleasant thought because if you develop an aversion for something that occupies the mind even more. It would be a form of craving. Cravings and aversions are the two sides of the same coin. If you crave for something it occupies your mind. If you have aversion for something it occupies your mind even more. Protecting the mind against negative thinking is essential. It is important to indicate that it is not a cop-out like putting the dust under the carpet so that you don't see it anymore. No, you do this kind of activity of protecting your mind when you don't have the time to deal with the underlying issue which is causing you to have this unpleasant thought occurring.

You can deal with the issue when you have the time, when you are at peace at home. You analyse the situation by developing a complete view (here you have to be very clever at finding all the points of view that need to be analysed) about the issue which is causing the unpleasant thought to pop up and eventually

you make peace with that, let it go and eventually the underlying unconscious process which is causing you to have this unpleasant thought will be at peace and this unpleasant thought will not come anymore.

Most of the time in life situations or in meditation, you don't have the opportunity to do this deep analysis so you need to protect your mind and drop the thought. Applying this kind of technique, counting in my case, has been most useful. In particular it gave me a chance when I can deal with the issue privately to really apply myself in developing a complete view again, in writing, letting go, putting in place my skilful intentions, reinforcing these intentions and eventually the underlying process becomes peaceful: as a result I have dropped one suffering.

There are other techniques in addition to counting, in particular Metta which is to repeatedly sending good wishes towards the person you maybe having a negative thought. This person is often yourself. So replace a negative thought by Metta to yourself.

In addition to the thinking you apply the 8FP for developing skilful speech and a skilful actions all based on your intentions. About speech I follow the Buddha's eight aspects of right speech which are: no lies, no divisive speech, no harsh speech and no idle talking and asking oneself before speaking: is it true? Is it useful? Is it the right time and is it going to be said with a mind of loving kindness? That's the eight aspects of skilful speaking to apply in particular to the person we speak with the most: ourselves.

About skilful actions I follow the Buddha's five precepts (protecting life, not taking what is not given, no lies, no sexual misconduct and no mind altering substances) and more importantly developing the positive aspects of: being grateful (finding at least three things I'm grateful about every day), cultivate joy and in the end: all my actions are in line with my skilful intentions I set in the previous step.

It's only when you reach this fed up stage that you will decide to transform yourself...

Question 20: *What you describe, particularly making peace with your past is extremely important, crucial. What will be the reason, because actually I agree that this is not presented in much details in the Buddhist writings, that in the Buddhist texts this aspect seems to be missing? Do you have some hypothesis why it is like that, that such an important aspect was omitted?*

Answer 20: I think it's because of the usage, in a practical way, of the eight fold path is never exposed in the *suttas*. There are many *suttas* where it is said: this or that aspect is to be abandoned by using the 8FP but it doesn't say exactly how you use the 8FP.

As I said before, unfortunately the first step of the 8FP which is a *samma ditthi* has been misinterpreted by all traditions as being just focussed on the four truths. That is OK if you consider truth number one and number two, or rather if you consider the tasks associated with these two truths which are: fully comprehending *dukkha* and abandoning craving. Explaining *samma ditthi* as being also truth three and four makes very little sense particularly for truth number four as *samma ditthi* is part of this truth.

If you look at *samma ditthi* as a tool to be used for achieving the two tasks associated with the first two truths, then you ask yourself: "What are the views that I need to develop associated with the existence of *dukkha*, with the task of comprehending *dukkha*?" and then "What are the views that I need to develop for abandoning craving?" That's the entry point into the transforming process.

First you have to understand what is your personal *dukkha*. Every one of us has a variety of *dukkha*. Because *dukkha* is not one thing, it has many different aspects specific to each individual. Every one of us has to discover what are their different flavours of *dukkha*. You have to look at your personal history, look at what

are the situations in life which cause you a certain set of emotions and feelings. I have documented 300 feelings (see Annex 2) that we human beings are capable of experiencing as well as an additional aspect which is called the five wounds that are often inflicted upon us whilst growing up. (The five wounds are: rejection, abandonment, humiliation, betrayal and injustice.) My biggest wound I had to heal was injustice.

300 feelings is really a source of confusion! A particular situation causes us to express a certain number of these 300 feelings. Every one of us will have a different set of feelings associated with a particular life situation. A particular situation may cause only few negative feelings in some people but a lot in others, so you should discover that for yourself.

The first step of the transformative effort is to discover yourself, particularly from the point of view of your suffering, your *dukkha*. By the way the word *dukkha* is not only about suffering, it is a lot about dissatisfaction. There are a lot of dissatisfactions in life which do not always go to the extreme of suffering. I think that's very important to review your past and for each event of the past that is unpleasant to you, use the 300 feelings, tick, tick, tick, mark all the ones with are relevant to the situation, look at the five wounds and tick the ones that are re-opened by this situation. Progressively you build for yourself a database of : life situations -> emotions -> set of feelings -> set of wounds. Then you look at that and you say: "Whoa! This is the way I experience such a situation. This situation causes these wounds to reopen in me. What can I do about that?" By building your knowledge about your specific *dukkha* you are doing the task associated with the first truth. You have acknowledged: "This is my 1st set of sufferings".

Then you go to the next step and you ask yourself: "Okay now what are my reactions to each of these individual situations?" "Oh this situation which gives me this set of feelings, this set of wounds, I react to it by having that fear or by having that aversion." Our specific response again is something that needs to be discovered for each one of us.

I have expanded the word aversion/ill-will into a set of 128 different fears and aversions (see Annex 3). I take this list of 128 items and I colour code them to qualify the intensity and frequency of each one of them in me. If I don't have any of it, the colour is green, if I have little bit of it it's yellow, if I have a lot of it's orange, if it is a huge issue then it is red. At the end of this exercise you have a visual representation of your list of fears and aversions. You see all these red, orange, yellow and hopefully few green and you realise: this is my mental state, my unskilful reactions (i.e. my 2nd set of sufferings) when some specific situations are occurring in my life. This constitutes your 2nd to do list.

I call these two lists: the to do list of what needs to be undone. Looking at this map you are hopefully experiencing a fed up stage where you are telling yourself: "I'm fed up with the way I react to situations in my life". For example "I'm fed up for becoming angry in all these situations". "Is there a better way of reacting?" And it's only when you reach this fed up stage that you will decide to transform yourself. This is the first stage associated with the 1st truth of the Buddha: discovering the particular flavours of *dukkha* that we have.

Abandonment is not through knowledge...

Once you have done this, in great details, then you engage into abandoning these unskilful reactions. This abandonment is not through knowledge. This is another big misunderstanding of the Buddhist traditions. Although, and I agree with that, the cause of everything is our ignorance or delusion, you don't eliminate ignorance and delusion just by knowledge. Knowledge is only the 1st step.

You need to go to the emotional and feeling stage of abandoning the reactions to the situations in order for them to be effective. Knowledge does not remove the effects (i.e. the cravings) of ignorance and delusion.

For example, the knowledge that going into anger that all traditions keep repeating: "it's bad for you, it's bad for others" is not going to remove it from your psyche! Yes, of course I have this knowledge, but having this knowledge does not remove my anger. One unfortunate thing that this knowledge could do, because of the associated shame and guilt, is to make us suppress anger, which is what I had been doing all my life, which was causing me a lot of trouble in the body and the mind until I decided to transform myself by dealing with the underlying issues.

In order to remove my anger I had to make peace: "Dry up the remains of the past!" I had to make peace with my past, the people, the events and then transform my reaction of anger into another type of reaction. Replacing the old habit of going into anger by a new habit that I reinforced again and again. That's where the Buddhist traditions are inadequate. They do acknowledge that the cause of all our problems and what is preventing us to realise *nibbāna*, are the three poisons and that we have to abandon them but they don't explain how.

***samādhi* is not a concentration thing, not something you "do", not the result of specific meditation practices...**

My conviction today is that all traditions have the implicit belief that by just meditating the three poisons will disappear from your psyche, one day. Like a magic wand is going to do the job. That's another huge delusion of the Buddhist world and of the "spiritual" world today such as the mindfulness and *vipassanā* movements!

The work that needs to be done is very clearly said; it's the task associated with the second truth: abandon craving. He doesn't say abandon craving by doing meditation. It is to abandon craving and then truth number four says: use the 8FP to do the job. What job? Abandon craving. This is the only job that we have to do in our life in order to become awakened, abandon craving by using the 8FP, nothing else.

Another major mistake in my view of all traditions is the misunderstanding of *samādhi* and that's huge. Because *samādhi* is the end of the path. Because *samādhi* has been translated as concentration people think: "Okay I should concentrate, I should focus on my breath" and all traditions are doing a lot of practices around monitoring your breath for example at the level of your nostrils, a very traditional way, and then your mind goes away and comes back and goes away and come back and so on and progressively you increase your capacity of being concentrated. They are trying to do *samādhi*. But *samādhi* is not a concentration thing, not something you "do", not the result of specific meditation practices. *samādhi* is not described that way in the *suttas*. *samādhi* is described as being the four *jhānas* that you just enter into once you have abandoned the five hindrances via the skilful use of the 1st seven components of the 8FP (see AN 7.45, SN 45.28, MN 117, DN 18, DN 33).

You know you are in *jhāna* because you are experiencing a certain number of qualities which are clearly listed in the *suttas*. If you are in the first *jhāna* you have *pīti* and *sukha* and *vitakka-vicāra*. So you are experiencing *pīti*-joy in your mind, *sukha*-pleasure/happiness in the body and with the *vitakka-vicāra* you are thinking and pondering and without hindrances your thinking and pondering is already much more purified than usual. When you go to another *jhāna*, for example *jhāna* three, *pīti* is gone, *vitakka-vicāra* are gone but instead you have the ability to use your mind to contemplate with equanimity whatever topic you wish. There is no specific content in *jhāna*. You don't have to do anything specific or think about anything specific while in *jhāna*. Anything can come to you and you can deal with it.

In *jhāna* three you have equanimity so you can contemplate anything with equanimity while still experiencing *sukha*-pleasure in your body. That's quite an amazing thing because the first time you enter *jhāna* three you come to realise: "Whoa! I can experience pleasure in my body without any craving for more

because I am in equanimity!" Then you enter *jhāna* four where the *sukha*-pleasure disappears but you have perfect equanimity and a perfect *sati*-attention and you are still totally feeling your whole body as the simile so beautiful describes it. It's as if you had a white cloth covering your whole body and you feel every part of your body, fully.

That's quite different to anything presented in the traditions about *samādhi*. By the way I call the four *jhānas* the end of the path because the end of path is when the equanimity of the fourth *jhāna* has spilled over into your daily life (equanimity is the last of the seven factors of awakening).

The misunderstanding of the first entry of the 8FP (*samma ditthi*) and the misunderstanding of the last entry of the 8FP (*samma samādhi*) and the wanting to go to the end of the path (*samma samādhi*) before developing and fulfilling the whole path by fully transforming yourself, has caused the Buddhist world to be totally upside down. I call it: putting the cart before the horse. The entry point in the traditional Buddhist approach is meditation which for me is the end of the *dhamma* path. The Buddha didn't say meditate. He said: "Dry up the remains of your past," you will experience *samādhi* and "you will move from place to place in peace."

The first step of the gradual path is the only one where we have "to do" something...

If you read so many of the *suttas* that talk about the gradual path, you will see an amazing thing which is also not fully understood but I now do understand it very well which is "perfection of *sila* causes no regret". This phrase is so important. Perfection of *sila* causes no regret. This is another huge mistake of the Buddhist world for which *sila* is following the precepts for the lay people or following the *vinaya* for the monastics. Don't do this, don't do that; putting people into a frame will suffice for having a perfect *sila*. That's only a very small aspect of *sila*. *sila* has to be all the work of transforming yourself.

Ponder this phrase, "perfect *sila* causes no regret", then ask yourself about your fears and aversions. For example in my list of 128 aversions I have fear, I have anger, I have irritation, etc. For each one of them ask yourself the following question: "when I am angry, do I feel any regret after?" The answer is: "yes!" "When I have this fear, do I have any regret after?" The answer is: "yes!" "When I am irritated, do I feel any regret after?" "yes!" Every one of the 128 fears and aversions also causes you, on top of the *dukkha*, regret which is another form of *dukkha*.

No regret which is the beginning of the gradual path, no regret as result of perfecting *sila* means you have abandoned the three poisons or at least most if not all of your cravings and aversions. After that the rest of the gradual path just falls onto your lap without having "to do" anything. From perfect *sila*, no regret then you experience joy then you experience *pīti* then you experience tranquility of the body and of the mind then you experience *sukha* then you go into *samādhi* (the four *jhānas*) then after that you have perfect vision of things as they are and so on and so on until liberation and the end of suffering and you are an *arahant*.

If you follow the gradual path you cannot jump into the *samādhi* step because you have to do all the other ones before which will allow you eventually to experience *samādhi*. The first step of the gradual path is the only one where we have "to do" something. As far as doing, us as human beings, the only thing for which we have to do something is to abandon the three poisons at the beginning of the gradual path towards awakening, and we do that by using the 8FP. I'll explain later how the latent tendencies are abandoned.

When you have a situation which causes unpleasantness (or pleasantness) the best thing to do is to do nothing...

Question 21: *Let's go back to the basics. Suppose for instance I have some desire or some aversion like the example you have given: I'm shy and public speaking causes me problems. I have an aversion to that or I have a desire maybe to some carnal aspects, maybe to the opposite sex. How can I gradually remove that feeling, that emotion from my life? Suppose I have reached that stage which you described where I am fed up with it. I have seen the complete picture. I'm fed up. I have seen that it's causing me suffering. I don't want that anymore. What do I do now? How do I gradually remove this poison from myself? What should I do when the situation occurs in my life now?*

Answer 21: At the time when the situation occurs and that you are feeling an unpleasant situation and that you are having a reaction to it, first notice the sensation in your body which is called an emotion (you also have an emotion in your body when you have a craving).

It's very important because we are not in control of ourselves and of the universe. When you think about control we have very little available to us. It is how we react to situations. Everything else which is occurring in the universe we have no control of. When I think about me as a sentient being 99.999% of what's going on in this thing called me is not under my control. Fortunately because my body has millions of processes which are happening which I have no direct control of. If I had to control them I will be dead in the next millisecond. If I had to control my heartbeat, my digestive system, my immune system and so on and so on, I would have no chance of doing so. The only thing I can do about my body is helping my body by providing good air to breathe night and day, good food, not too much but enough to sustain my body, exercise, good sleep and so on, so I can help my body function well.

When it comes to my mind I have no control about the thoughts which are popping up in my consciousness. They come for a good reason. It is because there is some underlying process which is trying to do his job, unconsciously, until he encounters a brick wall then he pops a thought in my consciousness for me to deal with. That's where I have to be clever! Once there is a thought appearing in my mind that's when I have to be skilful in reacting constructively to this situation. Because if I don't do that, then my underlying process will not be happy and so the thought will pop up in my mind again and again until I resolve the issue satisfactorily for my underlying process and then the thought will not reappear.

In order to reach that stage of reacting skilfully to situations I consider we have to do these three steps of making peace with the past, with the two steps of making peace with the people including oneself and making peace with the unpleasant events associated with these people and oneself. Then you will find yourself just having to face what's going on in real time and replacing your unskilful reaction which is the old habit that we have established early on in life, by something skilful that we have carefully, consciously decided to put in place instead.

When you have a situation which causes unpleasantness (or pleasantness) the best thing to do is to do nothing. Just be totally present with the situation and in order to do so the first signal which is given to you by your underlying process is the emotion that you feel in your body. If you are very well attuned with your body state at all times then when you have an emotional reaction you will be alerted. It's like a red flag shown to you that gives you a good opportunity to not go into automatic reaction. The best reaction that you can put in place at that time is just to stop and be present. Stop doing, stop reacting, just be. We are after all a human being not a human doing.

You can reach the stage of wanting to transform the automatic reaction into a more skilful reaction (doing nothing) only after you have already done the job of being at peace with the past because the past has so much influence on the present and causes so many fears for the future that you cannot really be working on the reaction aspect skilfully at a time until you are at peace with the past.

Question 22: *So suppose I have this fear so when the fear pops up in my awareness and manifests in my body a particular emotion I just do nothing? I just register it?*

Answer 22: You just watch it. Observe, stay with it, fully present and notice the quality of this thing. You notice the quality of this fear. I had a fear for many years which disappeared 2 years ago, at the time I said it was by luck because I didn't understand how it happened then. I had the fear of height. Where I live there is a tower in the middle of the forest where you can go 15 m high and every time I was going up this tower I got the dizziness associated with the fear of height. Until one day going up the tower I noticed the fear was gone. Before that, before explaining how I think that fear had gone by itself, when I was going up that tower I was trying to be very present, feeling all the emotions and feelings that I had in this kind of situation so that I had a full understanding of what was going on within me. I was not reactive to it in the sense of not adding a fear to it. Thus not having the fear of the fear if you see what I mean....

The only way is by not reacting, just being with it...

Question 23: *So you came to accept, that's it, there will be fear. There was not this reaction: "I want to remove," not remove by somehow, I don't know, "suppress this fear?" "I'm afraid of this fear." There has to be an acceptance of it ...*

Answer 23: Yes. There are two aspects. Not adding an aversion to a fear, otherwise you make it bigger than it is and also not having the craving for it to disappear. It's really a very fine line. That's why the only way is by not reacting, just being with it.

I was with my fear and I was continuing my going up until reaching the top of the tower and still experiencing this fear of height but I was totally within it, I was totally experiencing the thing. Noticing all the qualities. So it was not preventing me to go on top of the tower and I was not having a craving for this fear to disappear. At that time I had no understanding of what the fear of height is all about. I thought, some people have the fear of height, other don't. I thought it was some genetic condition. When one day it disappeared I was surprised: "Whoa! I can now go on top of this tower and not experience any fear!" I kept doing it, again and again and the fear never came back. I was very happy with that but I could not trace it to anything specific I had done that had removed this fear.

With a bit of research I came to realise that some people have the fear of height as result of some medical condition, which was not my case. It's usually a psychological issue and the issue is the lack of confidence in oneself. When I realised that, I reflected on all the work I had been doing for years of transforming myself, eliminating bit by bit, this fear, this aversion, and so on, as result of these efforts I had progressively built more and more confidence in myself.

For example you talked about the fear of public speaking which is famous for being the fear of most people. It's a fear I decided to face. To tackle it by looking at it squarely. Where I live there are groups that practice public speaking on a weekly basis. One day a workmate who belonged to one of these groups invited me to a meeting. At that meeting a question was asked and when I imagined myself answering that question by standing on the rostrum in front of everybody, I got butterflies in my stomach and the fear: "I hope I'm not going to be asked to answer it!" Of course, as a visitor, I was not asked but I remembered my reaction and I said to myself: "I don't want that. I want to abandon that fear." So I said to myself: "I'm going to face this fear".

So I joined the club. I joined and it was a very pleasant and supportive environment for learning how to overcome our fear of public speaking and I progressively became a rather good speaker and I have no more fear now of speaking in public. One of the ideas is to use the butterflies which cause you pain in your

stomach instead, to make them fly as in a flock so they sustain your energy to make you speak more confidently.

Some fears you can deal with them by facing them or by developing a complete view about it that makes you realise that this fear is nothing, it has no basis, nothing permanent there and it's totally manageable. Some fears you deal with them by tackling them, some disappear just by the fact that you build confidence in yourself.

Ultimately when you become an *arahant* there are absolutely no fears of any kind left in you. That's a very very nice thing. This means that you can face any situation, known or unknown, with equanimity.

Dealing with craving for feminine shape...

Question 24: *Let's suppose I have lust for something, for the opposite sex, how can I gradually remove that?*

Answer 24: What we are talking about here is attitude. We have a certain attitude towards certain things and in this case you're talking about craving, craving for sexual pleasure. What I discovered which was confirmed by reading some *suttas*, is that of the three poisons, craving is very difficult to tackle. Delusions have a lot of consequences and are very hard to abandon. The ones which can be removed more easily, are aversions, fears, ill-will, my 128 flavours of that.

The good thing is when you deal with your aversions, fears and ill-will you are at the same time working on some craving aspects because for each aversion you have an associated craving. For example one of my favourite aversions, if I could say it that way, was of women shouting at me. I developed this aversion of women shouting at me, because when I was a little boy my mother was shouting at me, a lot. As result I developed the craving for women to speak nicely to me. The two things are the same thing, the two sides of the same coin.

Aversion for something is a craving for something else and vice versa. The good news is that when you have finished with your specific flavours of the 128 fears and aversions, you have also eliminated a lot of cravings. It will remain at the end only few cravings that you need to tackle separately. The two that you mentioned which are food and sexual attraction or attraction to beauty, craving for beautiful forms are two big ones I had to address once I had finished with my particular flavours of fears and aversions. For these two I had to develop my own approach how to tackle these issues. In my case I had in particular this attraction for women and this craving of seeing the most beautiful women all the time. I knew that.

You know you have the situation where you walk in the street and you see far away, this form walking towards you and you realise this is a feminine form and then you are imagining, fantasising, this is most beautiful woman coming my way. She's coming my way, I'm going to see the most beautiful woman in the world. When she is at your level you realise of course that she is not the most beautiful woman in the world and then you've got this deception. Does it stop you doing that? No, you do it again and again and again because you have always this craving for seeing the most beautiful woman in the world. So I had to develop a strategy about how to deal with that.

One of the strategy that I also found in the *suttas*, is avoidance (protecting your six sense bases). Avoid the things that cause you to have this kind of reaction. The *suttas* say avoid the *nimitta*, avoid the signs which make you react with craving. When I was looking at the form I was trying to find the perfect shape of the woman and all the features that I like in a woman which by the way are very much dependent on each one culture and personal history. When we recognise the shape that we like our craving augments, an emotion appears somewhere in our body (my stomach in my case) and we even fantasise having sex with this person.

So I decided to try this strategy of avoidance. For months as soon I was seeing in the corner of my eye a form that I thought could be feminine then I made a conscious effort of not looking at it. I did it again and again for several months. This is how I replaced the old habit of aiming for a beautiful form by one of disinterest leading to the abandonment of the craving for it. I noticed the result of this effort few months later on when I travelled from the country where I live where it was winter so all women were covering their flesh to a country where it was summer and all the women were exposing a lot of flesh. Suddenly I realised: "Whoa I can look at all this flesh and it doesn't cause any reaction (emotion) in my body and any craving in my mind!" Again my body was giving me the signal (by its absence), I didn't have any more the emotion that I used to have in my body when I was aiming at looking at a beautiful feminine form. I can now look at the forms of what I still consider a beautiful woman without any issue.

That is when you have equanimity in your life. You are not depending on protecting yourself all the time from the things that cause you problems. Avoidance is a strategy that you use for a while until you have abandoned the thing (became dispassionate about them) then you can come back to them with a new approach once you are sure you have abandoned the craving for them. Again that's what the gradual path says. When you have reached a stage where you don't have any more attraction for the thing because you have no more delusion about it.

Question 25: *Just avoiding for some time the nimitta, the features, the qualities of beauty in women leads ultimately to disappearance of this lust all together so that once you re-introduce the situation it is now viewed with equanimity?*

Answer 25: Yes. Let me just take a document that talks about the gradual path because it's important to hear what the Buddha indicates what is happening there. Yes, through this practice you are becoming disenchanted about the thing. Before you had an enchantment about the form, the *nimitta*. It's an enchantment, it's a delusion about the thing. You think that this particular shape will cause you some special happiness or something. It's totally delusional, you are enchanted. A step on the path of progress of the gradual path is that you become disenchanted. When you become disenchanted about something then you can abandon the craving for it. You become what's called dispassionate about it. You lose the enchantment, you lose the passion and then you can abandon. You had enough of that.

You can enjoy the thing but without cravings...

Question 26: *Is it not possible for it to come back?*

Answer 26: That's the thing which is interesting when you transform yourself. A particular aspect that you have been working on very consciously at with the intention to abandon it, once you have abandoned it, it will not come back. But as I said you can enjoy the thing but without craving. It is clearly said in the *suttas* in the Samyutta Nikaya there are three types of pleasures: the pleasures of the five senses, the pleasures of *jhāna* and the pleasure of having finished the job which is *nibbāna*. All three are OK. It does not say that the sensual pleasures are not to be experienced. The only thing is that you don't crave for them.

Having abandoned the craving for something you can enjoy it with equanimity. Which is now what I'm doing. I'm enjoying being around women and all of them are beautiful in some ways. It's a funny thing once you have abandoned the craving for some specific *nimitta* you find that all things are okay. All women are beautiful, all men are beautiful. There is no question about that. The *sutta* from the Sutta Nipata (Snp 5.11.4 where the Buddha replies to the young Brahmin Jatukanni) that I mentioned before, starts with "dry up the remains of your path" and continues with "have nothing for your future, and if you don't cling to the present then you can go from place to place in peace". The previous phrase in this *sutta* starts with: "Lose the greed for pleasure." That's the thing, having no craving about anything you can move from place to place, from moment to moment in peace and with joy and happiness and pleasure. I talked about the craving associated with beauty, form and sex.

Craving for food...

About food I had to develop another strategy because I had also, not a very unhealthy but not a perfectly balanced relationship with food. I was more interested in eating for the pleasure of eating rather than just for the sake of sustaining my body. I had to develop a specific strategy to put these two things together because it's also important to eat with pleasure. The Buddha mentions in some *suttas* that if you don't eat something with pleasure then you are not going to digest it properly. So you better have pleasure eating food which is also good for you. So the quality of food is important. It is also very important to have an attitude of equanimity towards food, to be very mindful while eating.

The good thing about food is that it's a practice you can do two to three times a day. You can notice your relationship with food two to three times a day. You can easily monitor your progress in this regard. At the beginning I noticed how I was reacting to food. I was trying to find the best part of the food on my plate and leaving it to the end so that I could have it as my last taste. So I noticed, "For years that's the way I set up myself for eating my food". Aiming for the last bit to be the best. That was my intention for a long time. "Okay that's the way I eat!" Then I asked myself: "Is there a bit of craving there?" And the answer was of course: "Yes, there is a bit of craving there!" What can I do about it? Can I develop a more balanced attitude of just eating whatever is coming onto my fork and whatever is left at the end will be okay? So I developed this practice and you practice eating whatever is coming onto your fork and accept whatever will constitute the last bite.

You also notice the effect of eating on your body. I came to realise that the more I keep the food longer in my mouth, ensure I chew it properly, and digest it easily and also I become full much quicker than before when I was not chewing properly. So I developed the practice of chewing, chewing, long enough and training my system to notice when I have enough food. As a result I have now developed a habit of eating quite healthily, just enough and no more than I need. I have also lost the craving for having the pleasure.

Another aspect I considered carefully is the pleasure of having something in the mouth is not lasting. It's lasting whilst in the mouth and when it has been swallowed it's gone. When it's gone, it's gone! Before I had a bit of regret about this situation and wanting more and then I realised "that's a craving!" Enjoy the pleasure of the food while it's there in the mouth and then accept the fact that you don't have this pleasure anymore. Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, things are changing all the time. No worries! So I progressively developed a new attitude towards food.

The last item I added was monitoring my food intake over the day. If I was taking a certain amount of food during the day, the last meal will be depending on the amount I had already eaten during that day. I have been doing this for a long time and that gave me the chance of having just enough food. As result of that my weight which had never been a real issue, is now very stable at the bottom of the scale related to my height. I'm quite happy with that in particular knowing that sentient beings who eat less have a greater chance of living longer.

I want to live a long life so eating less should help fulfil this goal. Sometimes it happens that I have not eaten enough during the day so I find myself waking up in the middle of the night and feeling I need to eat. Okay my body is asking me for some food, I'm happy to give it and that's okay. Again it's all about knowing yourself and being very careful at living a life presently and not going into any reactive mode of any kind, just dealing with the situation as skilfully as possible.

You have to have desire in order to function in life...

After a while it's becoming a game. Life becomes a game, a transforming game where having had some success at transforming that bit and then that bit and abandoning that bit and that bit the cravings the aversions are automatically replaced by something pleasant in the mind, in particular peace of the mind. In the end you want more of this. Having a desire for more non-craving, non-*dukkha*, is a good desire to have.

There is also one aspect I found in some Buddhism circles where they say that desire is all bad, that I don't agree with at all. Craving is definitely the cause of *dukkha* but desire is not. You have to have desire (under the meaning of intention) in order to function in life. If you have no desires why would you get out of bed when you wake up in the morning? You have to have the desires to go to the toilet, to wash yourself, to have breakfast and to make something of your day. More importantly, having the desire to end *dukkha* is definitely a desire to have. Without the desire for it you will not end *dukkha*.

The *jhānas*...

Question 27: *So maybe we should return to the topic of the *jhānas* now because you mentioned many times that *jhāna* is not an active meditation practice aimed at transforming ourselves but the result of what we do in our daily life, the result of previous removal of craving, aversion and delusion. Can you talk more about your experience of the *jhānas* and about your view that *jhānas*, I mean the first, second, third or fourth, what is their practical role on the path for self transformation?*

Answer 27: My first experience with *jhāna* was in the February 2014 as result of doing a long retreat, a long self-retreat and it was an amazing experience. Interestingly it took me two years to experience *jhāna* again! But I was absolutely not concerned about that because I knew very well that the prerequisite for entering *jhāna* is to abandon the five hindrances. You are able to abandon the five hindrances temporarily in long retreats because your mind becomes peaceful because you have nothing much affecting your five senses and so eventually you are able to abandon the five hindrances in this kind of situation but it's artificial, not permanent. When you come back in your home situation, with your busy daily life you cannot in your meditation experience *jhāna* because you cannot really abandon the five hindrances.

In my case the main hindrance in the past was restlessness, the busyness of the mind. And also I had a bit of misunderstanding about what *jhāna* was about at the time because my first *jhāna* was so powerful, the *sukha* was so strong, at an amazing level, the pleasure of *sukha* was so big, I thought if I have another *jhāna* it has to be of the same intensity. It's only after two years that I came to realise that I was entering *jhāna* without realising it. OK the pleasure is not as big as before but it is there. So I came to realise that yes my meditation at home was going into *jhāna* regularly. The next realisation was that I could move from *jhāna* one to *jhāna* two and three, but not four, for quite a while, for several months.

The role of *jhāna*: there is a pleasure greater and more lasting than the pleasures of the five senses...

It's a particular event, I think, that allowed me to move from *jhāna* three to *jhāna* four. It was an event that occurred via a psychological process called EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) that I did a year ago, in June 2019. This process allowed me to do something that I thought I had already finished with which was to finish drying up the remains of my past. What was left for me to do was to integrate the little-me within the adult-me. Integrating the Emotional-self together with the Intellect-self and the Spiritual-self (here I'm using the Hoffman Process terminology). This event was key for allowing myself to be totally integrated. This integration allowed me to go thru the full equanimity of *jhāna* four.

I started to experience *jhāna* four in June July 2019. From that moment on all my meditations, so now for more than a year have all been *jhāna*. Every time I do meditation even for just few minutes always enter *jhāna*. When I am entering *jhāna*, it's often *jhāna* one, often *jhāna* three, sometimes *jhāna* four and once or twice *jhāna* two. As result I came to have a good understanding of what *jhāna* is all about.

The first and very useful role of the *jhānas* is coming to realise, it happened to me four years ago with my 1st experience of the 1st *jhāna*, coming to realise that there is a pleasure greater and more lasting than the pleasures of the five senses. When you are experiencing the pleasure of *jhāna* it is a pleasure which lasts for a long time. Several minutes, sometimes 40 minutes, sometimes one hour, whatever the duration of the meditation is, you are experiencing pleasure when you are in *jhāna* one, two or three. *sukha* is an absolutely amazing component that you discover and the big thing is that you come to realise that you can experience pleasure again and again, not by doing anything specific but it just happens to you; you let it happen again as result of the abandonment of the five hindrances and this is not something associated with taking something from outside and putting it into your system as you have to do for the pleasures associated with the five senses.

Realising that you are going to experience pleasure for long periods just by letting your system produce it within you, is quite a discovery. Because suddenly you realise: "Oh yes, it's true, joy, happiness and pleasure are within me and do not depend on external things for them to occur." This is the first realisation of the role of *jhāna*: realising the nature of the pleasure of *jhāna*, basically that we have within us a goldmine that we can tap into any time.

I'm lucky now to experience *jhāna* every day twice a day as I mostly meditate twice a day so I experience pleasure without having to do anything twice a day and that's quite amazing. This is really a true refuge. When the Buddha talks about you are your own refuge, *jhāna* is really a true refuge. For me this is one of the very important aspect of the role of *jhāna*. In particular when you experience pleasure with equanimity which is the situation in *jhāna* three, it makes you realise that: "Ah, well, for the first time in my life I can experience pleasure without having a craving for more." Because I'm in a state of equanimity of mind and I just enjoy the pleasure of *sukha* in *jhāna* three; it lasts for a long time; I don't crave for it; I don't long for it; it happens, that's fine.

You learn to enjoy things with total equanimity. That is a very important aspect. Your relationship with happiness, joy and pleasure changes as result of experiencing *jhāna* that way. These emotions that in normal life we are often craving for, to be happy, to be joyful, to have pleasure, these emotions you can experience them fully without any craving of any kind, just totally equanimous. So that's a very important role of *jhāna*.

Another role of *jhāna*: abandoning the latent tendencies...

When I was near the end of the path I knew that there was one aspect that the Buddha talks about which is to abandon the latent tendencies. Having systematically worked on my cravings, my aversions and my delusions and as I said before I was already several months free from all fears and aversions so I knew there was this aspect of having to abandon the latent tendencies in order to realise *nibbāna*. Latent tendencies are not easy to deal with as we don't have direct access to them. It is not with the use of the 8FP, I mean the 1st six components of the 8FP that I had been using to abandon cravings and aversions that you can abandon the latent tendencies. What gave me some confidence that I could finish with the latent tendencies without having to do a special work, was reading a book from a scholar, Keren Arbel's "Early Buddhist Meditation," an amazing book about the *jhānas* where she hypothesises that *jhāna* could be useful for abandoning the latent tendencies. I took this on-board and said to myself: "Hum, let's see if her theory is correct." At the end of the day I could not say when I noticed that the latent tendencies had disappeared but having experienced *jhāna* for several months before I reached the *arahant* stage, I consider that this practice of *jhāna*, I mean

being in *jhāna* because *jhāna* is not a practice, I don't practice *jhāna*, I am in *jhāna* because I have abandoned the five hindrances, this regular entering and dwelling in *jhāna* eventually had an effect on my mind which means my brain as well, that has allowed the latent tendencies to be abandoned without having “to do” anything. That aspect is for me one very important role of the *jhānas*. For a long time I had been convinced that the end of the path is *samma samādhi* which is the four *jhānas*. There is nothing else to do after that. The end of the path is when you have finished with all aspects of craving, aversion and delusion, which include the latent tendencies. *samādhi*, the end of the 8FP, the *jhānas* are the tools that allowed me to finish the job. This is what I have experienced.

Distinguishing between different *jhānas*...

Question 28: *Can you tell me more about the particular jhānas. What is the difference between them? What are the distinguishing factors? Is it the same as in the suttas? How do they look like from the point of view of someone who is attaining them on a regular basis?*

Answer 28: I did a little calculation. One year of *jhāna*, two meditations a day, makes minimum 700 *jhānas*. So already in a year I have done some 700 *jhānas*! It's ironic that 10 years ago, I was **so** craving for achieving *jhāna*. You don't have to have any craving, it just happens all the time once you have abandoned the five hindrances. Anyway now I have quite a good experience of *jhāna* because it's just what's happening all the time, every day. As I said before sometimes it starts, like this morning I did 45 minutes of *jhāna* one, then moving to *jhāna* two and doing a bit of *jhāna* three. Other times I enter directly in *jhāna* three and sometimes directly in *jhāna* four. I have become very attuned, very able to recognise in what *jhāna* I am.

This is by noticing what's happening in the body. That's why the centrality of the body in the *dhamma* is absolute paramount. The role of the body is absolutely central to the *dhamma*. That's one fundamental difference, I think I mentioned it already, with other religions Christianity in particular, where the body is to be put aside, sinful and so on. For the *dhamma* this is totally wrong, the body is central to the practice. There are so many practices that the Buddha was telling us to do associated with the body including of course the first *satipaṭṭhāna*. It's by being attuned to my body that I know in which *jhāna* I am. I always start all my meditation with a little exercise (see Annex 5) based on Thanissaro Bhikkhu book about the breath, which I call "the 12 steps for being fully grounded in the body" where I scan the body using my breath as a torchlight. At the end of this little exercise which is 12 breaths so it takes some 20 seconds, I have a full awareness of my whole body state. As soon as I finish this exercise, in fact often in the middle of it, I'm already noticing *sukha* which is happening if it is the case (*jhāna* four has no *sukha*) somewhere in my body, usually in the legs. This morning it was filling up my whole body particularly the front of the body, my chest, my stomach and the guts. You notice the presence or absence of *sukha* and you notice the quality of this *sukha*.

The quality of *sukha* is different...

The quality of *sukha* is different between *jhāna* one, *jhāna* two, and *jhāna* three and non-existing in *jhāna* four. But something else is happening in your body in *jhāna* four.

In *jhāna* one you experience *sukha* which is of a type burning I would say, it's a heat. It's like if you are close to a heater and you feel the heat pervading your body. The intensity of the heat is not exactly the same in all parts of the body, some parts are hotter than others but I feel some heat everywhere. That's how I know I'm in *jhāna* one.

Then when I am noticing, I don't do it, it's happening, when I notice that I'm moving into *jhāna* two suddenly I start feeling some freshness and it's like a stream moving within my body and the simile of the

Buddha is so correct about that, I feel this stream of freshness progressively taking the place of the heat in my whole body. That's how I know I'm in *jhāna* two, when I get the activity of moving freshness within the body.

When I reach the stage the freshness is covering the whole body and I know I am now in *jhāna* three. The other component also found in *jhāna* one and two is *pīti* which is a mental component, joy, is not as strong for me now. It's more an overall contentment. I'm at peace, contented. So *pīti* is not the main thing I notice. The fact that *pīti* disappears when entering *jhāna* three is not the main thing I notice. It's more the fact that I have an established freshness of *sukha* all around my body that tells me that I'm in *jhāna* three.

When this freshness *sukha* of *jhāna* three disappears I found myself in *jhāna* four. Then I experience something else again in the body which makes me realise, yes I am in *jhāna* four. I have this full awareness of every part of my body and that's quite amazing to see that the simile of the Buddha is so true. I remember when I was reading this simile before I succeeded entering *jhāna* four, I was a bit confused. What does he mean by that simile? Now it's so obvious to me. So you have a cloth, the simile says a white cloth but the colour is not an issue, covering your whole body, every part of your body is touched by the cloth, which means that you have the sensation of a cloth touching every parts of your body and this is so true to what is happening when you are in *jhāna* four.

So it's all about being fully grounded in your body and noticing what sensations you have in your body which tell you in which *jhāna* you are. The activity of the mind is not that important for giving you a signal. Yes, I am thinking and pondering in *jhāna* one. I am not thinking and pondering in *jhāna* two. I'm sometimes contemplating in *jhāna* three and *jhāna* four. I could be in silence in any of them; it's not that important. At the end of the day, *jhāna* has little to do with the content of the mind it's mostly what's going on in the body.

That's why it's so silly to hear about the *Theravada* interpretation in the *Visuddhimagga* that in *jhāna* the body is gone! The prerequisite for entering *jhāna* according to the *Visuddhimagga* and some *Theravada* teachers (not all of them) is that you have to abandon your body. That's exactly the opposite of what is described in the *suttas* and that I've just described that you have to know what's going on in your body and notice the quality and presence or non-presence of *sukha*. That's why the so-called-*jhāna* as described by this *Theravada* tradition and *Visuddhimagga* are not *jhāna*. I called them something else, in fact for me this situation where you abandon your body, where your body is completely gone and that in fact mean that your mind is kind of gone as well because you cannot get out of this situation by an act of will, you only get out when your system makes you get out of it (It's like sleeping. You wake up when your system decides. Although you may have an indirect control by, at the time of going to sleep, setting your internal clock by having the intention to wake up at a certain time. You can do the same for this type of meditation). This kind of practice for me is *nirodha*, cessation of perception and feeling. This has nothing to do with *jhāna* and it's not, for me, a practice that the Buddha was proposing us to do. I intend to talk about the *samāpattis* and *nirodha* later on. This practice is clearly not part of the 8FP. So for me, it is not a practice that will lead to abandon the three poisons and realise *nibbāna*.

Thinking in *jhāna*

Question 29: *Can you think in jhāna? Can you think and ponder in the first jhāna?*

Answer 29: Of course you can think in *jhānas*! The thing is that having abandoned the five hindrances already in *jhāna* one, your thinking and pondering is already purified because it is not tainted by any craving, aversion, restlessness, remorse, sloth, torpor and doubt. So the thinking and pondering that you have in *jhāna* one is already quite okay. You can take any subject coming to you and think and ponder it with detachment. I usually go into silence when I go into *jhāna* two. For some reason the entry into *jhāna*

two is associated with the mind becoming silent. That's the only little effort I do if my mind is active in *jhāna* one and I intend to go to *jhāna* two without any forcing situation but I make a little effort to become silent and it's very easy to do. You can drive your mind in *jhāna* much more easily than in your daily life. Your mind is very pliable in *jhāna*. In *jhāna* one you can enjoy a bit of thinking and after a while when satisfied you can become silent.

When you find yourself in *jhāna* three, sometimes the thinking restarts. In this case I call it contemplation. Something comes to you and you just contemplate it and then you get insights from this contemplation. But again you could be totally silent in *jhāna* three and *jhāna* four. From one day to another, from one meditation to another it is always different. It's not like playing a piece of music, playing the same piece of music will have a similar effect. Each *jhāna*, each meditation is always different. The main characteristics are there but you don't feel bored in *jhāna* because it's always something interesting to be curious about. For some reason an *arahant* is not always in the fourth *jhāna*. The first four *jhānas* therefore still have a role to play in the life of an *arahant*. However today I do not know what is the role of each *jhāna* for an *arahant*.

So, yes, in *jhāna* your body is totally functioning, your mind is totally functioning and you are not in any special state. You are not in altered consciousness. You are totally functioning but your mind is in a little more pure state because again it is not tainted by any of the five hindrances. Then you have the equanimity of *jhāna* three and *jhāna* four which makes you realise that you can have a thought about anything. You can decide to take a very challenging topic, something which usually, when you are not in *jhāna*, could make you have a reaction, in my case not a fear or an aversion but some uneasiness, and you take this topic while in *jhāna* three or *jhāna* four and look at it without any reaction of any kind, total equanimity and that is when you get true insights. *samatha* and *vipassanā* are the two sides of the same coin. When body and mind are at peace (*samatha*) you naturally get great insights (*vipassanā*). These two qualities are not a practice, they are naturally developed by having abandoned the five hindrances and dwelling in *jhāna*.

nimittas...

Question 30: *Do you experience any luminous images signs which are called in Pali terminology nimitta in the jhānas?*

Answer 30: No, no there is no sign, not flashing in your brain, not in your mind, no, no effect of any kind. When I was trying for seven years, so very hard to do the so-called-*jhāna* which I don't call *jhāna* anymore, yes I was trying to get this *nimitta* after having focused on my breath for a long time and having the breath become shallow and quiet, I was putting myself into a dark room so it could be such that I could see the *nimitta* in my brain not coming from a bit of light from outside which will make me pretend that I have a *nimitta* while it could have been just light coming in through my closed eyes. So no there is nothing fancy happening in the brain while you are in *jhāna*.

There are no methods for entering *jhāna*...

Question 31: *As a way of summary can you describe exactly the entry into *jhāna*. Is there any method? What would you describe is a necessary condition? What drives getting into the first *jhāna* and later on to the higher *jhānas*? What is the method? How can I get into *jhāna*? To summarise how would you answer the question how can we get into *jhāna*?*

Answer 31: There are no methods for entering *jhāna*. The key to *jhāna* is abandoning the five hindrances. The five hindrances are craving for sensual pleasures, fears and aversions, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. If you look at each one of them how do you abandon them? Each one of us has to find a way of doing that. The best thing to start with, is to become a stream enterer because when you have become a stream enterer you have abandoned doubt and doubt is one of the things that prevents us to go towards

some direction because we are not confident that this would bring anything valuable to us. So abandoning doubt is pretty good by just entering the stream. Unfortunately there is no method that I can prescribe for becoming a stream enterer because it happened to me I would say just by luck or rather by the accumulation of developing progressively a complete view about all aspects of the *dhamma* and becoming more and more convinced that the *dhamma* was good for me. So it's not by a practice.

Anyway that's only for one of the hindrances. For the other hindrances, for example craving for sensual pleasures and fears and aversions I used the 1st six components of the 8FP to work on them one by one. These activities are done outside meditation. The thing is that if you do a good job at that then when you come back to your cushion to meditate then these hindrances don't appear as before. With the five hindrances you can work on them and find yourself in a better situation for them to be temporarily abandoned. For example, when you do a long self retreat where you are in silence, you have not many things coming into your six senses and then you have a better chance to abandon temporarily the five hindrances. This is what happened to me four years ago when I eventually experienced the first *jhāna*. This is very difficult to reproduce. You have to find yourself protected from the usual inputs into your six senses to have a chance to abandon temporarily the five hindrances again and again. That's a kind of artificial thing, it's not something you can repeat easily and particularly in your daily life, at home.

There is nothing "to do" other than being totally present with the situation occurring to you in real time, not reacting to it...

What counts is to abandon the five hindrances for good, forever. And that is happening through your personal effort of transforming yourself abandoning greed, hatred and delusion. Once you have done a good job at that, this is a protracted job, you have to work on your personal issues, your personal cravings, fears, aversions, and so on, working on them systematically bit by bit, using the process I explained at the beginning of this interview: the three steps of making peace with the past, people including yourself, unpleasant events associated with these people, and then the most difficult step which takes much longer which is to abandon your unskilful reactions to situations, both pleasant and unpleasant.

I have come to the conclusion that for that last step, abandoning old habits - unskilful reactions, there is nothing "to do" other than being totally present with the situation occurring to you in real time, not reacting to it. As result of being totally present, progressively the unskilful reactions will be replaced by equanimity to any situation in life. That is the work that will allow you to abandon for good the 1st two hindrances: i.e. cravings for sensual pleasure, fears and aversions. For the other two hindrances, sloth and torpor and restlessness and remorse, they are going to disappear progressively naturally as result of being without doubt and of having abandoned craving and aversions. Again the best thing to do when exposed to these two hindrances, is to do nothing, just be totally present with them and notice them disappear on their own accord. So the entry into *jhāna* is that you have abandoned the five hindrances. You can do it sometimes in some special situations but what counts is to do it at all times, to have abandon them for good. Then you have nothing to do.

I do nothing. I just sit on my cushion and I am in *jhāna*...

I do nothing. I just sit on my cushion and I am in *jhāna*. I keep asking myself at the beginning of my meditation: "Are you sure you're in *jhāna*?" In the past, this question about the five hindrances I asked myself very frequently. For years and years I was asking: "Which one am I in at the moment?" in my daily life as well as in my meditation. In my meditation for years it was restlessness, this was my big hindrance, so when I am in meditation now I ask myself in what hindrance I am in and I realise I am in none. As soon I

realise I have no hindrance and that I notice I am experiencing *sukha* or the awareness of my whole body, I know I'm in *jhāna*.

You don't do *jhāna*, you don't practice *jhāna*, you don't focus on your breath, you don't do *metta* or whatever technique. Yes you can do these practices in a retreat situation. If you stay for a long time with this kind of practice where you're focusing on your breath and you're good at staying with it, yes you may have no hindrances in this situation, possibly. But it is a forced situation. The aim is to enter *jhāna* without having to do anything because you have finally abandoned the five hindrances for good.

When you enter and dwell in *jhāna* this way, without having to do anything, this is when you have found the true refuge, the refuge in you that the Buddha asked us to become. You then know that at anytime you can go to this refuge. This is one of the essential role of the *jhānas*, to become a place of refuge.

I experience that I am in equanimity all the time...

Question 32: *Let's now enquire about the difference between the state of an arahant and of an ordinary person. Because this is one of the most interesting and unclear things. How different is the state of an arahant from an ordinary person? What is the exact difference? Having been on both sides of the fence, how would you describe your new mode of functioning in comparison to the old one? How does an arahant live?*

Answer 32: When I think about how I am today I don't see a fundamentally different person in terms of the way I function in life. I mean I have not lost my history and what I have been through in my life makes me what I am today. By becoming an *arahant* you are not becoming a certain type of person. You are somebody as before but without something. The without is without craving, without craving of any kind. The three cravings mentioned in the *suttas* are: craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming and craving for non becoming and when we talk about craving for sensual pleasures that includes the flip side which is fears and aversions. I'm a totally functioning human being without these things.

That's why *nibbāna* is so difficult to define because *nibbāna* is not a thing, it's the absence of something, it's the absence of the three poisons, the absence of the *āsavas*. You cannot define something which is not something. I am a totally functioning human being who continues to do everything he was doing before but without craving. In short that's what an *arahant* is all about. What do I experience as result of that? I experience that I am in equanimity all the time. That's why I understand now very well the seven factors of awakening when it says that number seven is equanimity. It's not *jhāna*, it's not *samādhi* which is the last factor, it is equanimity but the one before is *samādhi* which is the four *jhānas*. I came to realise that it's when the equanimity that you experience in *jhāna* three and four, spills into your daily life that you are an *arahant*, when equanimity is now in every moment of your life.

That's what you experience as an *arahant* in your daily life. You are in equanimity all the time which means that you continue to experience pleasant situations, unpleasant situations and neutral situations but in all three cases you are experiencing them with equanimity, which means that you are enjoying the pleasant moments, you are bearing with unpleasant moments, you are not having a particular reaction when something is neutral to you, but you have no craving for more of the pleasant moments, no aversion for the unpleasant moments and no delusion about the things you have neutral feeling for. That equanimity is there all the time.

You are still an emotional person. When I talk about emotions it's in the body. I still have a lot of feelings, positive ones. In terms of emotion I have very little emotions coming into my body. Before when I was experiencing an emotion in my body it was always associated with a craving, an aversion or a fear. While now when I have an emotion in my body which is very rarely, it is when I am facing a situation which has some challenge either positive but more often negative, when I hear a story or something that has happened in the world which is pretty terrible, then I sometimes feel an emotion in my body which as usual gives me a

sign, as I am very attuned with my body, I notice the emotion straight away and okay this is causing me to experience an emotion in the body and that's okay but there is nothing I have to do about that, I'm just being aware that my system is functioning very well, I'm still able to experience emotions in the body. But it's much more rare than before. Before there were many situations when I was still having plenty of cravings, aversions or fears, there were many situations in life which were causing emotions in my body.

Can an *arahant* have a feeling to cry?

One of the emotion I can have some time nowadays is having the feeling to cry. For example, when there is something particularly pleasant, watching a movie where there is this couple falling in love, I don't cry but I have some moisture in the eyes. Same while reading this kind of story or having some special insight can promote tears. All these events have to be of a very high standard for the feelings to occur!

I have compiled a list of emotions and feelings that an *arahant* can still experience by going through my list of 300 feelings that I've been using for years to transform myself. I went through this list to see which emotions and feelings I cannot experience anymore and instead the ones I can still experience (I have found 136 of them with only 6 unpleasant). I review this list regularly and recently I added this one about feeling to cry. This feeling to cry when some difficult situation occurs, has nothing to do with grief. Grief is an emotion which is gone in an *arahant*.

I do remember that when the Buddha passed away the only one who was crying around him was *Ananda*, because *Ananda* was not yet an *arahant* at the time. He was still having some cravings, fears and aversions so he cried when the Buddha passed away while the other monks and nuns who were *arahant* were not crying. That was something that had a strong impression in me 15 years ago, realising that you don't need to grieve in life, grief has a lot to do with feeling sorry for yourself. Annex 7 presents what I consider the list of feelings still experienced by an *arahant*.

I'm willing to enjoy whatever pleasures life has still to offer...

So that's about emotions and feelings Now about desire, I am full of desires (again meaning intentions). It's quite interesting to notice when I have a desire I ask myself: "Is it a craving?" and I answer: "No, it's just an intention to do something," to read a book, to watch a movie, to go for a walk or whatever, to have a croissant with a cappuccino with a friend because I like that and then at the same time I ask myself: "Is it okay if you don't have it?" Of course it's okay not to have it, so it's not a craving. When I had a craving before I was having an emotion somewhere in my body, today when I have a desire I have no emotion in my body and that's a very good sign to me. In the end I do still enjoy the pleasures of the five senses. I'm not avoiding these pleasures, I don't have much to protect my six sense bases anymore. Instead I'm willing to enjoy whatever pleasures life still has to offer.

For example having finished with my cravings for beauty and the feminine form, I have come back to enjoying looking at the feminine forms. In fact now I don't make that a difference between one form and another, some may be just a little bit more pleasant than others, but I have no repulsion to any form.

Thanks to the experience of *jhāna* three, I can experience the pleasures of the five senses with equanimity.

In term of functioning, I still make little plans of doing things, I do volunteering activities here and there, I have a certain number of activities that I am happy to have and I'm using my thinking mind to do all these but it is still within the scope of "having no plans for the future". I'm not sure if this makes sense, I make plans for example to travel but if it does not happen, it does not happen, but I have no plans, per se, because

I have finished the job. I think that the most fundamental thought that regularly comes into the arahant mind is: "There nothing left for me to do!" And that's a really nice feeling, knowing that I don't have to make big plans about finishing, about ending something, but I have an intention of contributing to this world for as long as possible.

I don't have fear and worry. I have concerns...

Question 33: *Do you experience fears and worries for the close persons you are connected with, like your family, for example if something bad was going to happen to them?*

Answer 33: I don't have fear and worry. I have concerns. For example recently I called one of my sisters and she was very distraught. I was concerned about her mental state but I was not worried because the only thing I can do when I face this kind of situation is to do what's called active listening, open my heart and send loving kindness thoughts, thoughts of compassion and wishing her to come out of that situation on the right side. A person for whom I really care and it's definitely not a worry, is of course my wife and one of my strong wishes is for her to be able to achieve the same thing that I am enjoying now. Knowing that nobody can transform anybody else, the only thing I can do is to be ready to help. That's why I want to be present and to be very attentive to her, as much as possible. Also I want to be at the service of other people who may wish to achieve the same thing that I have achieved. So yes, I have concern when I think about all the members of my family and some friends. Will they achieve what I have achieved? I know that the probability for many of them is very very low because they are not interested in the *dhamma* but I don't worry about it. I care about them and I make myself available at all times, waiting for the opportunity to arise. In the end, everybody is equal in my heart, I care about everybody the same, family, friends, strangers. Every person I meet is an opportunity for me to be a witness of the *dhamma*.

Question 34: *So there is certain gradation as if to say there are persons you care more about and there are persons you care less. Is there some distinction between level of care you have for persons in the world?*

Answer 34: Ultimately with the equanimity I was mentioning before I cannot say that I care more about some people than others. I have a kind of duty, duty of care for some people more than for others because they are the people who are around me. For some reasons we have these people in our life, wife, children, grand children, brothers and sisters and so on. For me they are just an opportunity to be more in touch with them and maybe helping if possible, more than for other people. But any person coming into my environment will be treated the same way. For example I'm currently running a number of activities around the *dhamma* and a group of people are interested to be with me for that and I really care to be helpful to them. There is not really a difference of how I see or how I treat people. It is only opportunity that some people are, at a times, close to me, so I'm more often in contact with them than with others, but every contact is an opportunity.

The true supernatural power of a noble person....

Question 35: *So far we have focused more on your emotional state when describing the difference between an arahant and an ordinary person, now how do you perceive the world? Does your perception of the world differ from an ordinary person because sometimes, you know, you get this claim that an arahant or an awakened person perceives the world entirely differently? For example the Abhidhamma would say that an arahant can dissect the present moment into millions of micro moments. There are also some experiences through the use of psychedelics where again a person experiences reality differently in certain ways. So what is your take on this?*

Answer 35: Fundamentally, my intellectual abilities have not dramatically evolved as result of becoming an *arahant* but I have definitely a sharpness of the mind which is the ability to be very focused all the time, at anything I do, think and in my communication. Verbal communication has become so easy. I remember

years ago I was so afraid of communicating with people, now I don't have to think about what I'm going to say, it just comes out totally naturally and I would say perfectly.

One thing I would like to emphasise, is that by becoming an *arahant*, you are not suddenly acquiring some out of this world abilities. For example it's mentioned and I think scholars will agree that it's a late addition, in the description of the awakening of the Buddha the *suttas* talk about acquiring this ability to see others passing away and being reborn, having the ability to read the minds of others, the ability to look at all his past lives, millions of them. None of that. Ability to travel by using a mind-made-body and these kind of things, no, I didn't experience any of that. The only thing is coming to realise that you have finished with the *āsavas*. That's what is important and it's nothing special, it's just coming to realise, I have finished the job. So there is no special mental ability as result of becoming an *arahant*, in my case. I will not deny that some people may acquire some of these unusual abilities. Dīpa Ma seemed to have been one of those who could create a "mind-made-body" (*manomaya*) and travel with it. The Buddha said in a *sutta* (DN 28) that these types of supernormal powers are *anariya*, not noble, instead "the *ariya* supernormal power (*iddhi*) is the abiding in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware". This is the supernormal power of a noble person who is free from the *āsavas* and free from clinging.

How does an *arahant* perceive the world?

Question 36: *So the world you perceive is the same world just minus cravings, aversions and delusions. Right?*

Answer 36: Yes, the world as the Buddha defines it so well, is as we perceive it through our six senses. This does not change by the fact that you are an *arahant*. The world is always as you see it through your six senses but now what you are perceiving is not tainted by any of the three poisons. Which means that you are not projecting anything into the world that you perceive. Your eyes are still giving you colour pictures, your ears are still giving you a certain range of frequencies and so on.

I know through science that what my senses are able to provide me as information about this world is very limited so I'm very humble about what my system is capable of providing me as information. But also and most importantly whatever I perceive, the feeling which is the first activity happening in me associated with a contact, I can change that. The fact that I found something pleasant or unpleasant, it's something which is changing. Progressively with the experience of equanimity I don't have anymore strong reactions of pleasantness or unpleasantness to anything. Knowing very well that my feeling associated with a contact is the result of my past activities around these things, this feeling can change. Now I experience much less pleasantness and unpleasantness compared to before. Things become much more of the neutral type, I would say, but not in the sense of indifference but of equanimity. I don't know if this makes sense. For example my last fear to be abandoned was one of my biggest fear in my life: the fear when a woman raises her voice towards me. Now not only this fear is gone, as well as the associated craving that women speak nicely to me, but now the feeling of unpleasantness of a woman raising her voice towards me is almost gone.

Question 37: *Sometimes you can read in the descriptions of the dhamma that the proper view of the world it's not as of objects, stable objects but as processes. Can you relate somehow to that or is it not an important distinction?*

Answer 37: Oh it is, it is so important. That it's one of the thing when I talk about the *dhamma* to people I ask them: "Why was the Buddha interested in processes and not in objects?" So living your life as seeing it as a set of processes, appearing, staying for a while, decaying and disappearing, is very important. Seeing the world as a flow, always in movement, impermanent, is totally ingrained in me now. There is no attachment to any thing solid and imagining anything solid, ultimate. There is no such concept for me anymore. Yes, everything is of the nature of processes. That was one of the amazing insight of the Buddha to come to realise that there is nothing solid, to which you can attach a self. This is a very liberating insight, I

would say, to come to realise that that's what life is all about. It's just things appearing, staying for a while, decaying and disappearing.

Protecting the senses....

Question 38: *Let's ask now a question concerning a different topic. Buddhist texts speak about the crucial role of protecting our six sense bases. However they do so in the context of the secluded life of a Buddhist monk. Yet you claim to have become an arahant while living as a lay person. This entails facing entirely different conditions: music, television and now Internet. So how can you protect your senses in such an environment? Is it possible at all?*

Answer 38: The idea of protecting our six sense bases is a strategy to put in place at some stage on the gradual path towards awakening. For a while it is useful to have this strategy. I explained, for example, how I put in place this strategy to abandon my craving for beautiful forms, feminine forms in particular. This strategy I decided to apply, once I had finished with my particular set of fears and aversions and associated cravings, when I decided to work on all the cravings left in me. First I had these two cravings: beauty of feminine forms and food. Then I thought about the other senses.

I said okay what is my relationship with what's going on in my ear. Ah music and I came to realise that my attitude towards music had some cravings. For example I was listening to Schubert, my favourite musician, quite often when I wanted to be in a certain mood. I was using music as a mood altering substance, if I could say. A bit like when I was smoking to give me some pleasure. So I came to realise, I have this attitude, so I made a decision, I'm going to stop listening to music. I made a conscious effort, for the time being I am abandoning music. I mean the music that I choose to listen to. I could not be totally without music because of the environment I am in, I could still hear music put by others but it was not something that I was putting myself in order to be in a certain mood. I did that for music, I did that for TV, I did that for newspapers and books. I said to myself, my mind knows enough about what's going on and in particular the sufferings of the world, I don't need to watch the news every night on TV or read newspapers because it's always full of bad news. I know enough about the sufferings of the world I don't need to feed my mind again and again with that and having a reaction of aversion to all this bad news like I had at the time. So I decided I'm going to stop watching TV, I'm going to stop reading newspapers. I didn't have to do anything about the smells as I had no issue there, so I didn't have to protect myself against perfume or whatever. I also decided to stop all sexual activity.

That was how I put in place the strategy of protecting my six sense bases. I did this for several months until I realised that I have finished with the craving or aversions around these things so I decided to come back to them. I can now decide to listen to whatever music I'm happy to listen to. I notice that I can spend a reasonable amount of time listening to music just for the pleasure without any craving, for example I recently investigated all the lieder written by Schubert, he wrote several hundreds of them, I decided to listen to as many as I could and I found this website in Germany where this guy is singing beautifully so many of them. I spent time listening to all that and now I'm finished with that and I am listening to whatever is coming my way at a time.

But I don't need music. I spend most of my time happily in silence. Most days are spent with no music, no TV, no newspaper. I'm not interested in TV because unfortunately the quality of the programs is not very good, so I am avoiding TV because it's not a useful source of information for me except if my wife says there is something interesting. "Do you want to watch it?" "okay, yes let's watch it together."

In fact there are a lot of things I do now as result of someone else asking me to do, which is good because I have no more things on my bucket list. Regarding the internet, I found it more easy to be selective about what I access. I didn't have to abandon the internet as I did for TV and newspaper because I didn't have too

much of an addiction for the internet. I had a balanced attitude for quite a long time so it was not an issue for me.

The idea of protecting our six sense bases is a strategy, at a time, just for the purpose of abandoning the cravings, then when you notice the craving is gone, sometimes you notice it just by chance, then you can come back to these activities and enjoy them. So protecting the six sense bases is a temporary strategy. That's one of the differences between a lay person and a monastic. A monastic until he/she leaves the monastic order will be under the rules of the *vinaya*. He/she will be prevented from attending music shows and so on, watching TV and I'm not sure about newspapers, while a lay person, once the craving is gone, can come back to the activity he/she has temporarily abandoned. Anyway for an *arahant*, lay or monastic, in complete equanimity there is nothing to crave for, there is nothing to push away so protecting the six sense bases is no more necessary.

My Lion's Roar...

Question 39: *You make very bold claims and you seem to possess absolute confidence in what you're saying. Do you think this attitude has grounds in early Buddhism? Many modern teachers choose to remain silent about their own achievements.*

Answer 39: About the confidence about what I'm saying it's about potential issues with view. I don't have strong views but I have clear view about something at the time and I'm happy to present my view but I'm not attached to them. I am always ready to reconsider my views if there is new information that affects my current view. The fear of being attached to my views is not there and also I don't have the fear of not expressing my view when I consider that it's a good idea to present my point of view. I understand now the statement of the Buddha when he says that he has no issues with the world but the world may have issues with him. Meanwhile I'm not interested in having and winning arguments about anything but I'm happy to present my point of view.

Now about talking about my achievements. There are not many people on earth who currently know where I am. When I became a stream enterer and two years later on entered the first *jhāna*, I decided to mention it to a few people but not to people who are close to me. So few people knew about these achievements. I was always monitoring the reaction of people to my opening up to them and noticing if it was useful to them or possibly not, on the spot and later on. That's one of the important aspects of right speech: is it a good time? is it true? is it useful? is it said with a mind of loving kindness (*metta*)? Was it useful to the other person has always been something I was reviewing after having given my testimony to them. The same happened after I finished the job a year ago. I now have maybe 15 people on earth who know this achievement, less than the people who know about my stream entry event because I consider that some of them in this list may not be ready to receive this latest information.

When it came for me to tell the world that I have finished the job, which is what the Buddha was doing as mentioned in several *suttas*, it's called the lion's roar, I had the idea of doing it with a monk here some months ago (I didn't do it in the end). I had found in the *Therīgāthā*, the testimonies of the awakened nuns, where one nun, having finished the job, went to the Buddha to produce her lion's roar. I was impressed by that so I said to myself: "Where can I find someone to whom I can produce my lion's roar?" Although I remember years ago when I was reading, in the *suttas*, the Buddha producing his lion's roar, again and again, I thought: "It looks like this guy is proud. Has he got a big ego or what? He is supposed to have abandoned conceit!" Now I realise that he was not conceited at all. He was just expressing the joy of having finished the job. It's such an amazing feeling and you want to share with someone this joy and relief of having nothing more to do, having realised *nibbāna*. There is this little urge, it's not a craving, of going to somebody and produce your lion's roar, which is what I'm doing in recording this testimony.

But one has to be very careful about whom you open up to. Some years ago, I was talking to a lay teacher and got to realise she was not one to whom I should open up as she had mentioned in our conversation, that, for her, anybody doing this, is doing it out of pride. That's the attitude of all lay *dhamma* teachers. Now this is for me one of the big issues I found in the Buddhist world today. Monks and nuns are prevented by the *vinaya* to talk to lay persons about their achievements, of any kind. Just saying they have entered *jhāna* is not possible for them. Even saying they have abandoned anger or one of the five hindrances or talking about the practice they are currently doing and what for, they are not allowed to tell us because of a *vinaya* (minor) rule. The lay teachers are doing the same. They are not talking about their personal achievements, which means that all these people, lay and monastics, when they talk about the *dhamma*, it's as if they were reciting a book they have learned. They are not telling us their personal experience. They are not telling us how they practically uses the *dhamma* to abandon one or another of the three poisons.

In my life, what has always been useful is when people open their heart and talk about their personal struggles and then about their achievements, in a very honest and simple way, without pride but just naturally as it was for them. This has a profound impact on me when people are telling me: "I went through this difficulty and that one and that's how I overcame them by using this or that aspect of the *dhamma* and this allowed me to have such and such achievement on the path to *nibbāna*."

Why are we facing this situation in the Buddhist world today, while at the time of the Buddha, as recorded in the *suttas*, everybody knew who was what, a *putthujjana* (not any achievement), a stream-enterer, an *arahant*? So there are grounds in the early Buddhist texts for disclosing your achievements on the path to awakening. And no, there is no pride and puffing ego there in doing so! It's something you witness in life all the time: people wanting to share what has worked for them. Human beings (and other animals too) have these mirror neurones in the brain. This may sound a bit grandiose, but I open up just out of compassion for the world. Having finished the job, I want to share the news with others that, yes, it is possible to do it. You don't have to become a monastic for realising *nibbāna*. Then I am keen, but only for those really interested, to share in great detail how I have used one aspect or another of the *dhamma* to achieve it. And that was what was happening at the time of the Buddha. At the time of the Buddha we knew very well who was what. We knew that *Sāriputta*, the Buddha and other men and women were *arahants*. We knew that this person and that person was a stream enterer. Who was what is written in the *suttas*. Which means that for a person on the path to awakening they could go to a known *arahant* and ask: "Oh you, you are an *arahant*, how did you finish with anger? How did you do that? How did you use the 8FP to do that?" and the *arahant* would have answered the question.

Today I cannot go to anybody on Earth, lay or monastics who call themselves Buddhists and ask: "Have you finished with anger?" They will not answer me. So I cannot go to the next question witch is: "How did you use the 8FP to finish with anger?" I found this situation really terrible, that's one of the main problems of the Buddhist world we are in today.

By giving my testimony, it has nothing to do with being conceited, it's just trying to be helpful. My testimony could be helpful to someone who wants to achieve the same thing, reflecting: okay this guy claims that he has eliminated anger, how did he do that? And then I could explain the steps I went through for that. That's why I'm happy to do this testimony.

Now I have a big question about this testimony that I'm giving here. How am I going to pass it around? That's a question I have not yet an answer for. It could be published as a book, an eBook. I'm surely not going to email it to my contacts. I want to keep this testimony anonymous, I'm not giving my name, my address, my contacts. Shall I pass it around now or should I keep it until I pass away, I don't know yet?

Note: Since the time of this testimony I had the idea to make it available on an anonymous blog: <https://awakening-in-the-21st-century.blog/>

Can an arahant get angry?...

Question 40: *You mentioned anger, you mentioned the process of removing anger. Can an arahant get angry? In the suttas we often find the Buddha admonishing his interlocutors for their mistakes, for their stupidity. Sometimes it seems to appear he does it in a harsh way. What is your personal take on that? Why is it like that? Is it realistic, is it possible, can you still get angry?*

Answer 40: It's one of the major issues for people to accept, I think it's part of the doubt component of the five hindrances, to accept that the job is to completely abandon this kind of thing. Anger is a big one. Later on you will have to abandon irritation, commenting, whatever (see in Annex 3 the list of 128 fears and aversions). Accepting that we have to completely abandon anger, is difficult for many people, particularly in the Western world because even some psychologists will say that anger is a useful emotion. If a psychologist, not all of them, considers that it is a useful emotion, then after that they will even say that it's impossible for a human being to completely abandon and not experience anger any more. With that kind of statements people believe that it's impossible to completely abandon anger, that there will always remain some trace of it, until one day as it happened to me four years ago. As a result of transforming themselves, people realise that they cannot express anger anymore. The same situations which before were causing me to go into anger were not having this effect on me anymore. From that time I exposed myself to more and more situations to see if there were any that would cause me to express anger. It never happened, when anger is gone it's gone for ever!

However I had this concern: some people consider that anger is a useful emotion and now I don't have it anymore, how will I be able to defend myself in some situations if I cannot become angry? And then, life is really amazing, I discovered that we have within us a much more powerful emotion for which I don't have a word for it, which will replace anger when needed. I discovered it by doing something I had never done before which is to do theatre. At 70 I became an actor by joining this group where I learned to act (again for the purpose of looking for buttons to unscrew). One day I was given a role in a play where, in one particular scene, I had to express anger. During the rehearsal I could not do that, because I cannot do anger, until I was told: "It's not you who has to be angry, it's your character!" You have in fact, to pretend, to fake anger. So I learned to do that: acting anger. I was able to do that and that was an interesting experiment.

What is the difference between this acted anger and normal anger? When you become angry you first have a sensation happening in your body which is called an emotion. For me, in the past, when I was becoming angry it was usually in my belly. So you start having the sensation of this emotion in your body usually accompanied with some heat and next you have your mind which is having negative feelings and then you go into reaction. Either you keep it inside or you lash out verbally and sometimes you even do some unskilful actions. All these things are lasting for a while. Then all these emotions, feelings and reactions decay, sometimes they can last for a long time before they eventually disappear.

Anger is a process with emotions, feelings, reactions producing heat within you, progressively decaying and disappearing. Instead in the case of the fake anger, the acted anger, it's totally different. Before it, you are, peacefully talking or doing something and then you decide very consciously to go into this fake emotion. Suddenly you go into, if you wish, a huge anger. The world sees you as being in rage. What's happening in you is that you have absolutely no emotion in the body, no feeling, no heat in the head, it's just an act and as soon as you have finished with it, you are back into your tranquil state. You have not felt any emotion, any feelings in all that time while the world thinks that you have been hugely angry while you were not at all.

I believe that's the state that the Buddha was in when he was admonishing his interlocutors. If somebody was touching the Buddha at the time he would have noticed no emotion in his body. I remember reading about Ajahn Chah doing exactly that to one of his monks while another monk was giving him a foot massage. This monk reported later on that Ajahn Chah was admonishing with very strong words and energy but this monk noticed that there was no emotion in Ajahn Chah's body.

Removing delusion...

Question 41: *You have spoken much about how to remove craving or how to remove aversion but this leaves delusion, the third factor remaining of the three: craving, aversion and delusion. So is there some specific way which you remove delusion?*

Answer 41: Delusion as mentioned in the *suttas* is the most challenging of the three poisons. It's the one which has the most consequences. In fact the reason why we have cravings and aversions is because we have a misunderstanding, a misinterpretation of things. So it has dire consequences but also it is very difficult to abandon, to remove. One of the points about delusion is that we often don't realise that we are deluded about something. What makes us realise that we were deluded is when we have new information. This new information makes us realise: "Okay that's not what I thought it was." Some delusions can just disappear like that by the fact that we have new information. That's why it's very important to have an attitude of openness and of always questioning, always looking for fresh ideas about everything on earth. The other way of removing delusion is, for example, I came to some phases in my life where I experienced a strong delusion which is called paranoia. Paranoia is a very painful delusion because you think that the world is going after you and that there is no way out, and there are a lot of fears associated with this delusion. I experienced it for the first time, in a very acute fashion 13 years ago after having done a retreat with a monk here where I thought I was going to reach the 1st *jhāna* as described in this *Theravada* tradition which, incidentally I have abandoned since, but at that time I was very keen to achieve. There I was on a high at the end of this retreat. And then suddenly I flipped down into paranoia, thinking that somebody was coming to get me because I was so happy and I'm having success or whatever. I had to go to the hospital and be treated by the psychiatrist about this. He gave me a diagnosis assuming I was bipolar. I said okay, I'll take this on board and then for the following seven years I was taking daily doses of lithium and careful about not having too much excitement in my life, monitoring my mood. Then I had a second episode seven years later which was when I had the stream entry event. I was so excited and then I had the same situation of going into paranoia. So I was again admitted to hospital. But fortunately some months later I met this psychologist, a woman, who had been dealing with people with deep mental issues like bipolar. After several meetings with her, one day she told me: "You are not bipolar, what you have is, due to your upbringing under the thumb of parents and educators with no place of refuge, the tendency to go into paranoia when something important, good, successful is happening to you." And then she added "Now that you are aware of this situation, I'm sure that next time you will be able to deal with it successfully." The next time it happened was when I succeeded to enter the first *jhāna*. I was so happy of having a succeeded to have my 1st *jhāna* and then next second I felt the paranoia coming into me. I faced it and I said: "no no I don't need to go there, I know it's a delusion, I'm fully aware of that, and I don't need to go there, I don't need that," and then pffff it went. It was like *Mara* appearing and then saying "okay no room for me" and then disappearing in the next millisecond. So delusion can be abandoned through knowledge as in this case. Realising: "no this is a misinterpretation of a situation" and knowing what reality is then you don't have to go there. The delusions that cause us having cravings, fears and aversions are going to disappear by the fact that you are abandoning these cravings, fears and aversions. When you are finished with your specific flavours of the 128 fears and aversions and associated cravings then having finished with the cravings of feminine forms, food, music, etc, I found myself without any cravings and any aversions left. As result of that the delusions which were initially causing me to have these cravings were automatically gone without having to do anything. To summarise, the starting point of everything is ignorance and delusion but you cannot always tackle them directly. The delusions are going to disappear sometimes thanks to the new information that makes you realise that you were deluded but mostly as a byproduct of having done the job of abandoning all forms of craving. This is the result of losing the enchantments.

We can inhibit pain...

Question 42: *Now let's move to a different important point. Buddhists often make a distinction between pain and suffering. An arahant is supposedly free from suffering but can experience painful feelings in a way that don't cause suffering. Is it also your experience? Does it mean that one can withstand any physical pain without psychological suffering? For example couldn't an arahant be subject to some forms of pain like surgery without anaesthesia or some stimulation of pain nerves or neurons which would not damage the body, and would he be able to endure it as long as he would wish to? Or are there some limits as to enduring physical pain for an arahant?*

Answer 42: In several *suttas* it is mentioned that monks who were *arahants* were experiencing excruciating pain and decided to use the knife. They committed suicide. The Buddha looked at these situations and declared that there was no issue there as these guys were *arahants*. I will not say that the Buddha was, in general, condoning suicide but in these cases of an *arahant* experiencing excruciating pain he had no issue with them committing suicide. So it seems that you can experience very huge pain while being an *arahant* but you add a layer of suffering to it by reacting to the pain with a fear or an aversion because an *arahant* is done with those.

I have a personal experience of not experiencing pain as well as suffering before I became an *arahant*. It happened three years ago. I think I experienced this situation because I had already progressed well on the path of abandoning fears and aversions. What happened is that I had a traffic accident. I was on my scooter and this woman in her big four-wheel-drive didn't notice me while she was coming out from parking while I was on the main road. She cut my route just when I was arriving at her level. I use the brakes and swerved to avoid crashing into her car, which I succeeded to do but eventually I fell and the scooter fell on my right ankle.

I found myself lying down on my back on the road checking how I was by scanning my body and noticing nothing wrong at all in my body and then I went into bliss. I had this moment of bliss which completely surprised me. When I reflected on this later, I thought usually in this situation what would I have done some years ago? I would've said to myself: "Oh no. It can't be true what this b... woman just did to me." Then I would have been angry at her. And I would have complained: "This is not fair!" Reopening the wound of injustice, my biggest wound of the past. No I didn't go to any of that. This kind of reaction that I was just mentioning is typical of how we add suffering to a situation. I didn't do that at the time instead I went into bliss, which was quite amazing. The funny thing is that I had this accident just near the emergency department of our local hospital so next minute I had an ambulance arrive with three guys: "OK remove your helmet and how are you going?" "I'm fine, nothing wrong." One of them looked at my leg and said: "Oh I think you've done something bad to your ankle."

Next minute I'm on a stretcher and rolled into the emergency room. A woman doctor asked me, where do I have pain. I replied that I have no pain. Okay but we need to put your ankle back into place and for that we need to give you a needle, to which I said, that I don't need a needle, I'm fine, I have absolutely no pain but she overruled me and gave me a needle anyway. Next I woke up and she said, it's back in place but now I need to have surgery. She gave me a room in the corresponding department. I then had a meeting with the surgeon who scheduled the surgery for the following morning.

Because I wanted to be part of it I decided not to have the full anaesthesia and instead just to have a epidural. That gave me the possibility to talk to the surgeon after the operation where he confirmed that it was a success, and I now had two plates holding my bones together and that I will be back walking in no time.

Back in my room in the middle of the afternoon I started to feel the effect of the needle receding and that's when I started to feel some pain in my ankle. Without really knowing what I was doing I started to do the

step of breathing into my right leg as I do at the beginning of each meditation, breathing out into the leg to move away the energy stored there. At the same time I was talking to my ankle saying: "Don't give me the pain because there's nothing I can do about it, the surgeon has said that everything is fine." Usually when we experience pain it is a natural process coming from evolution, luckily most people on earth have this ability of feeling pain when something is happening to their body, pain gives us the chance to react to the situation. Some people don't have this ability and it's quite dangerous because they can put their hand into a fire and don't feel anything but of course they still get burned.

So I was talking to my leg, saying: "No, don't give me this pain because I don't need that. There's nothing I have to do. Everything is fine." After a few minutes of doing this double practice of talking and breathing into my leg the pain transformed itself into pleasure! I could not believe that I was now experiencing pleasure where just before I was experiencing pain. I was fully amazed. During the afternoon and evening thanks to this practice I was not experiencing any pain. It's only when I wanted to sleep that I asked for a pain killer because I could not continue that practice while trying to go to sleep.

I woke up the day after with no pain and I never had pain after that during the whole recovery from the accident. So during the several weeks of recovery I never experienced pain. I did a bit of research about it because I was quite confused. I read that we have in our brain a certain number of pain centres that collect information from the whole body and decide for some reason to send or not to send a pain signal to us. For example you are a soldier at war and you get shot. The shot does not kill you or totally incapacitate you. You may not experience pain until you succeed to escape the situation and find yourself in safety. The same thing if you are a surfer and a shark comes and bites your left arm off. You may not feel the excruciating pain that you should normally feel. It means that our brain is capable of analysing the whole situation and of deciding not to send a pain signal because it knows that if it was doing so this will prevent the wounded person to run away from the situation. It's only once you are safe on the beach that you will start to experience pain. Very recently scientists discovered that the pain centres are controlled by a part of the amygdala to 'turn on or off' the pain signals. So that's quite interesting to come to realise that we have this ability within us physically to manage pain. We can inhibit pain. In my case I was inhibiting pain through my mental state. By not reacting negatively to a situation I was not adding to the situation instead I was having a positive attitude and the controller of my pain centres decided: "okay there is no reason to send him a pain signal" and that's how I was not experiencing pain. This happened to me two years before I finished the job. Basically if you do a good job at abandoning fears, aversions and unnecessary cravings then you are able to deal with any situation, like pain coming to you, in a much more manageable way than before.

Using the four noble truths...

Question 43: *Okay. Thank you. Now let's go to another topic. So far you have mentioned but not said very much about the four noble truths which are traditionally presented as the central teaching of the Buddha. Did the four noble truths play any particular role in your transformation process?*

Answer 43: Absolutely! Yes, I didn't talk about it explicitly but it is implicit in my method. The first step of making peace with the past is to write down everything about your suffering in the relationship you are dealing with, in the process of making peace within you with this person. This first step is the most important: to fully acknowledge your suffering. The 1st truth says: there is *dukkha* and the task which is the most important aspect of the truth, is to fully comprehend *dukkha*. Acknowledging *dukkha* is to be done all the time. The *dukkha* that we can really acknowledge is our own *dukkha*. Later on we can open up more easily to other people's *dukkha* but, ultimately, we cannot fully know about the *dukkha* of someone else. We can have a certain idea but not the full depth of it.

So the first truth is definitely an entry point all the time for me in all situations. Instead of reacting to events with: "This should not be like that. It is not fair. And so on ..." instead you look at the situation in life, about

yourself and other people from the point of view of: there is often a *dukkha* aspect to this. Then after that you ask yourself, “okay I am experiencing *dukkha*, what is my craving?” which is the truth number two. The task associated with a second truth is to abandon craving so you have to discover what is your craving. Often when we experience *dukkha* we don't ask this question, we forget about this point that we are the one who is causing us to experience *dukkha*.

The task associated with the second truth is the most fundamental component of the *dhamma* because that's the only task that we have to do which is to abandon craving: the three types of craving, craving for sensual pleasures that include fears and aversions, craving for becoming and craving for non-becoming. Asking yourself when you experience *dukkha*, “What is my craving?” is essential, because once you have found the answer to this question then you ask yourself: "What if I was not having this craving?" Then you make a conscious effort of dropping the craving. The effect is amazing. The first truth is associated with a sensation in the body, which is an emotion. When you are experiencing *dukkha* you have an emotion somewhere in your body and associated unpleasant feelings in the mind. When you drop the craving, the sensation in the body and the feelings in the mind go away straightaway (you are experiencing a bit of *nibbāna* - the third Truth). Again notice the centrality of the body there, at the time you experience *dukkha* and when *dukkha* goes.

The fourth truth is the one I was developing all the time. My method of transformation uses the first six components of the 8FP until they have developed enough for having the byproducts of this effort which is to experience *sati* which is to maintain easily your attention to what's going on in every moment of your life, daily life as well as meditation and then the *samādhi* component which is again coming to you as result, as a byproduct of having well developed the first six components of 8FP. The four truths have been central to me for a very long time.

The *satipaṭṭhānas*...

Question 44: *You've very strongly emphasised that one doesn't transform oneself through practice of meditation and that meditation is the result of the actual work in daily life that is to remove cravings, aversions and delusions. What about then other central Early Buddhist meditative teachings like the four establishments of mindfulness, the four satipaṭṭhānas? How are they to be developed according to your experience?*

Answer 44: In the *suttas* as far as I know there is not one word for meditation. There are many words which could be interpreted as a meditative activity, there is one word which is *bhāvanā* which means mental development and when we talk about the Buddha meditation per se, it is *samādhi*, the four *jhānas*, the Buddha doesn't use the word meditation for them.

When it comes to other components of the *dhamma* like the four *satipaṭṭhānas* it is not stated clearly that you have to develop them while you are practising meditation, where you are sitting or whatever posture you are using for meditating for practicing these kind of things. If you take the *satipaṭṭhānas*, the first one is about the body. It's about analysing, contemplating, looking at all the various aspects of the body in one form or another. This activity can be done in meditation but also while you are sitting at your desk or wherever you find yourself being able to stop and study the body using the 1st component of the 8FP, developing a complete view in this case about the body.

This activity of developing a complete view about the body can be done in meditation or any other setting, of course a quiet environment is better. When I started in the Tibetan tradition I was given an activity that was called an analytical meditation where a topic is given to you and you spend one hour pondering this topic while you are in a meditative posture. One topic which was given early on to me was death. That was an excellent topic because through this kind of activity I was able to abandon my fear of death. But again

what was happening during this one hour of so called meditation was basically applying the first component of the 8FP, developing a complete view about a topic which in one case was death. This kind of thing I could've done it outside meditation perhaps just sitting at my desk, analysing the topic.

One aspect of the first *satipaṭṭhāna* is to contemplate in a charnel ground the decaying body of a dead person. This is not an activity that you do in meditation as you have to find a place on earth, you may still find one in India, where you are with your eyes open in order to take note of what's happening, you experience the smell of the decaying bodies, etc. I did this practice some months ago. I found on the Internet a US YouTube site where you can contemplate various bodies in diverse stages of decomposition. They do it for forensic reasons. I was not in a meditative situation, I was taking in through my eyes all aspects of decaying bodies, noticing the emotions in my body, the feelings and reactions in my mind. I also found various sites where I could watch bodies being dissected. I watched the dissection of a young female who had committed suicide and of a very fat woman. All these contemplations were very useful to notice where I was, regarding the attraction and repulsion of certain bodies but again it was not done in a meditative situation.

That's for the 1st *satipaṭṭhāna*. The 2nd *satipaṭṭhāna* is about contemplating feelings, the three aspects of feeling, pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. This is something to be done in your daily life, noticing the emotions you experience in the body, the feelings you have in the mind from situation to situation. Meditation is not the best place for this type of study.

The 3rd *satipaṭṭhāna* is about contemplating your mental state. Noticing your mental state is important in meditation and also and even more in your daily life. Being fully aware of your mental state all the time is essential practice. And then the last one, the 4th *satipaṭṭhāna* is in particular about awareness of the five hindrances. Asking yourself about which of the five hindrances you are under at a time is a question to ask in meditation and most importantly in your daily life. So these *satipaṭṭhāna* practices are not only to be done in meditation but also in your daily life.

We have today English translations of the *suttas* (on the site suttacentral.net) done by someone coming from the *Theravada* tradition where he uses the word meditation all the time for many of the *dhamma* practices, but when you look at the *Pali* word that he translates as meditation, it's not there. There is not a word which could be translated as meditation. So we have to be careful when we read the *suttas* as translated by some people. It's important to compare with other translations to make sure that there is not a slant given by the particular Buddhist tradition the translator belongs to.

Having said that about the role of meditation, I've been meditating of course for a long time, 27 years now. I'm not saying that meditation is not a useful thing to do, absolutely not of course it's a very useful thing. You learn to go inside, that's the idea of meditation. It is to go inward instead of what we usually do in normal daily life which is getting things from outside and reacting to these contacts. The concept of going inside and noticing what's going on is definitely a very useful idea, but again, going inside can be done in and outside a formal meditation setting.

Meditation is definitely a useful practice, before I was able to enter *jhāna*, meditation was giving me the chance to know what was going on in me, what my current mental state was, what hindrance was bothering me and so on. But it is not in my meditation that I'm going to resolve the issue I discovered while meditating. I could just take note of them then when I was back into my normal life – when I had the time and the peace of mind for that, I will deal with the underlying things which are causing me to have this hindrance or whatever which is bothering my mind while meditating. If I was doing a good job at transforming myself then next time around the particular hindrance would not bother me. So for me meditation is a tool for noticing what's going on, dealing with the issue outside meditation, coming back to

meditating and eventually noticing the positive changes. Then a new issue will pop up and so on, it's a back and forth between noticing in meditation and dealing with the issue outside meditation.

Then one day I experienced no more hindrances, nothing was bothering me in my mind while meditating. Having no hindrances which is the key for entering *jhāna* I started experiencing *pīti* and *sukha*, the tranquility of body and mind and bang, without having to do anything, I entered and dwelt in *jhāna*.

***samatha* and *vipassanā* are the two sides of the same coin...**

Question 45: *In Buddhism there is a strong emphasis on the practice of insight. Vipassanā is a crucial liberating practice which is usually understood as bare attention or mental noting of all our activities, for example during walking or breathing. How would you evaluate such type of practice from the standpoint of your own experience?*

Answer 45: First the *vipassanā* movement is something relatively recent in the Buddhist world. As far as I know it started at the end of the 19 century in Burma. From there it spread around the world and became an popular movement that we are still living through at the moment.

When you look in the *suttas*, *vipassanā* is not described as a practice. It is a quality that needs to be developed. If you look at the number of *suttas* where the word *vipassanā* appears, compare to the number of *suttas* where the words *samatha*, *jhāna*, *samādhi* appear, you will see that the word *vipassanā* appears very rarely and it's almost all the time associated with *samatha* or *samādhi*. For me *samatha* and *vipassanā* are the two sides of the same coin. It is a set of qualities, *samatha* is peacefulness, tranquility of body and mind and *vipassanā* is the insight as result of that. You don't 'do' *vipassanā*, you don't 'do' *samatha*. Again once you have done a good job at abandoning greed, hatred and delusion then naturally you experience *samatha* and then because your mind is in peace and tranquil you have true insights coming into you without again having to do anything.

Now the approach, the attitude of just having bare attention to a situation is something I promote as the third step of the three steps of transforming oneself. In order to make peace with the past, you have to dry up the remains of your past, you have to make peace with the unpleasant events of the past, you have to make peace with the people associated with these unpleasant events as the first two steps and then after that you have to replace your unskilful reactions (a craving or an aversion) to the unpleasant situations by something else. In fact now I'm saying instead of replacing them, you just have, in order to abandon them, to be totally present with them when they occur. So when you're experiencing something which causes you to have a sensation in your body, it could a pleasant or an unpleasant situation but one that causes you to experience some *dukkha*, this emotion felt in the body is like having a red flag being raised by your unconscious mental processes. This red flag gives you the chance to become aware that something is going on in you and that if you don't pay attention, you are going to react in the usual unskilful way. That's when you apply the method of just doing nothing, being totally present with the sensation in the body, being present with the situation fully and then eventually you will train your unconscious process to not give you any more signals because you are not reacting anymore. Being present and not reacting is definitely a very good strategy but you can only do this after you are already at peace with the past events and the people associated with these events, including yourself and the unpleasant events of your past that you have created for yourself.

Life is like going to a sushi train restaurant (on the benefits of modern psychology)...

Question 46: *From your testimony it seems that you have relied not merely on teachings from the Early Buddhist Texts but also greatly on modern psychology. For example the Hoffman process or EMDR. From*

your account it seems that these were absolutely crucial steps and without them you wouldn't be able to do the job. But does this imply that the Early Buddhist teaching is incomplete in some way so the person that would rely solely on them would not be able to finish the job?

Answer 46: Life is like going to a sushi train restaurant. When you go to a sushi train restaurant you have got all these little dishes passing in front of you. You look at them and you tell yourself: "Hmm, this one is good, this one is for me. This one, no, you can pass, I don't need you." My attitude in life and I think it is a very important attitude for everyone to have, is to be an opportunist. When there is an opportunity, grab it and run with it.

I started my life without having any knowledge of Buddhism. I was in my 40s when I discovered the *dhamma* and it took many years before the *dhamma* became really useful to me. Before that as you know I experienced a lot of suffering and almost killed myself at the age of 27. When you have this situation society tries to help you to get out of it. I started seeing a psychiatrist but quickly moved to a psychologist. At the age of 28 I followed psychotherapy for one year. I was lucky to have found this guy who was a kind good father figure for me. That was useful because in the end he gave me reassurance that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with me. That I had been through difficult situations in my childhood and teenage times and that I just had to make peace with that and focus on the positive aspects of my life which I did after that. I have been using psychology on and off for the past 40 years.

I have been using psychology when I was having some specific questions about myself of course which I could not resolve through study or whatever. So I was confused and when you are confused then you are stuck. I'm talking about the things you cannot talk to your spouse or your friends so you need to have someone with whom you can bounce ideas because that's the job of a psychologist; their ability to listen and mostly not offer solutions but just giving you the chance to find the answer by yourself. When I was facing some situations in life I was saying: "okay I'm going to see a psychologist and discuss the thing." It's like you're having a good friend with whom you can really open your heart and talk deeply about things which are affecting, bothering you. As I said I did this on and off for the past 40 years.

About the issue of paranoia that I discovered totally by chance some years ago, I was lucky to find this woman psychologist who really gave me reassurance that there was no deep issue there, that it was quite a natural thing as result of my childhood trauma. At the time I was already in the *dhamma*. I will talk later on about EMDR. The point is about your question, is the *dhamma* good enough for abandoning the three poisons?, for being free from *dukkha*?, I will say that definitely the Buddha must have been the most amazing psychologist of his time, but what he said to help people to help them with their personal challenges is not in the *suttas*. I said before that how to use the 8FP, to abandon the three poisons is not explicitly stated in the *suttas*. Same for specific situations of life, when you're facing a problem with your wife or your children, with yourself or whatever, how to deal practically with is not written in the *suttas*. May be if I had discovered the *dhamma* earlier in life, a *dhamma* not tainted by any tradition, I may have been able to overcome my personal issues associated with my upbringing but ultimately I think it's important to see life as a sushi train. The *dhamma* has offered me a lot of very useful tools but I had to do a bit of cleaning of the *dhamma* in order to find the useful way of using these tools and stop focusing on the things that the traditions want you to focus on which is meditation. And stop trying to develop qualities which are not to be developed by a practice but as I said are the natural result of something else which is the abandoning again of the three poisons. I had to do a bit of cleaning of the *dhamma* for myself to be able to use it in a practical way for achieving where I am now. Possibly in theory the *dhamma* has everything we need but practically it does not because it's not written in enough detail in the *suttas*. It is everyone challenge to develop for themselves the practical usage of the *dhamma*.

EMDR: Integrating the little child in me...

To finish about why I used the specific psychological technique of EMDR just one year ago, it was totally by luck, again!, because at the time 18 months ago I thought I was done, I had finished, I have been at peace with my mum for a long time, 17 years ago now and at peace with my dad, and with everybody else, and I'm at peace with myself. So I thought I had finished drying up the remains of my past. But three years ago I did a seven days silent retreat and at the end of it, as I explained in another part of this testimony, when you do a long silent retreat after a while you have your six senses much less activated by contact with things which eventually allow you to be much more at peace. Anyway at the end of a meditation session I was just walking outside the hall and suddenly I got a flash of memory about something which, when I think of it, must have happened to me when I was maybe 18 months old or so. When I got this flash of memory, I wondered: "Is it true?" Then the memory became clearer and clearer and with more details, and with of course, my mother appearing on the scene and I got what I think was my first ever trauma with her at the age of 18 months. When I reflected on this memory I thought: "Oh well, this is just maybe my first traumatic event with my mum." But because I was then at peace with her I didn't think there was any issue for me to address at the time.

One year ago I mentioned this memory to a *dhamma* friend who happened to be also a psychologist trained in EMDR and she said "Oh I think I could help you with something there." Because life is a sushi train I said okay and I became a client of her. Thanks to all the work I've been doing on myself, transforming myself, I just needed two discovery sessions followed by just one EMDR session to resolve the issue with a second EMDR session to confirm the result. The reason why she proposed me to do EMDR on me was because in some situations the thinking brain is not able to process, desensitise and reprocess, some events of the past because these events are not accessible by the thinking mind. In my case my trauma was received at the age of 18 months when my brain was not developed enough, so the memory is not accessible by the frontal cortex component of the brain. So even if I thought that I was at peace with it there was still some left over unprocessed bits resulting from this event. For some mysterious reason the EMDR process where somebody moves something sideways in front of your eyes that you follow whilst thinking about the event, something happens in your brain which allow the event to be processed unconsciously and for you to become at peace with.

The situation I was in a year ago was that and it's a question that I now ask people to whom I am presenting my transformative process, is that my little self was not integrated with my intellect and my spiritual self. The question I ask is: "Where is the little child of you right now? Is he/she integrated within your whole you? Is he/she standing near you, sometimes holding your hand, sometimes looking at the big you with fear? Or is he/she nowhere to be seen?" In my case, one year ago, the little me (the emotional self) was standing near me, the big adult me, so he was not fully integrated with my intellect and spiritual me (here I am using the Hoffman process terminology). That was a discovery to me, that was the sign that I had not yet fully dried up the remains of my past. EMDR is kind of a magical thing, there is no clear explanation how EMDR works but it does. The fact that something is moving in front of your eyes while your are thinking about a past event (often a trauma) allows the event to be desensitised and reprocessed, putting everything into place.

That's what happened to me, at the 1st EMDR session, in just few seconds I felt the little me jumping into and integrating with the rest of me. That was magical! I felt fully integrated. From that moment, I have felt that I now have my little child back into me, at peace and this little guy wants to have fun now! It's amazing that at the age of 72 I have this urge to give pleasure to the little one who did not have fun while growing up. Now I do things in my life as result of my little child telling me: "I want to do this or that." So I say okay to him, and I'm very happy to do what he wishes. I sometimes engage in activities as a result of having a dream (years ago I was not paying any attention to my dreams but now I do). One month after becoming an *arahant* I dreamt that I was playing the piano. When I woke up I remembered and thought: "Yes, it's a good

idea!" I looked for a teacher and now started learning to play the piano at the age of 72. I'm having fun because I have no fears. Practicing does not give me any stress, I'm just having fun and I know I'm going to be good at it!

Then recently I discovered that there is this wind tunnel into which you can fly like a bird: one of the ultimate dreams for a human being! Because I have always been interested in something associated with the air element, in my twenties I did skydiving and hand-gliding so I decided I'm going to fly. I'm now flying in a wind tunnel, I did it yesterday and now I'm going to learn how to fly like a bird in the wind tunnel. This is my little self which is now fully integrated within me thanks to EMDR. I'm not sure if the *dhamma* would have allowed me to have this last component, this integration happening. This EMDR event of a year ago was what allowed me, for some reasons that I don't understand, to move from *jhāna* 3 to *jhāna* 4 and from that to finish the job which is to abandon the latent tendencies and then realising that the job was done.

I do not have the answer to the question if the *dhamma* is lacking something. I don't think that potentially it does but the practical aspects are not detailed enough in the *suttas*. In the *suttas*, you've listed what needs to be done, what needs to be achieved, the qualities to be developed, the ones that need abandoning, but it doesn't give you the recipe of how to use the tools of the *dhamma* for achieving all that. It's like if I tell you to make a cake, I'm telling you that you need flour, you need eggs, you need milk and that's it. I don't give you the proportions, I don't give you that you have to mix them a certain way, that you have to put the paste in a certain shape and in a certain type of container that will allow a certain type of baking, I don't say anything about the temperature and duration of cooking, etc. These details are missing in the *suttas*. That's why so quickly, I think, after the passing away of the Buddha the *dhamma* which is a practical method of realising *nibbāna* became a set of religions because people had to interpret this *dhamma* in order to make it work and I don't think they've done a very good job at that because we don't need a religion, we need a practice that works, a practical practice. That is what I found missing in the *suttas*, so I developed my own method for how to use the 8FP to abandon *taṇhā* (the three types cravings), the taints (*āsavas*), the three poisons (lit. "Unwholesome roots") (*akusala-mūla*), the five fetters (*saṃyojanā*), the ties (*ganthā*), the floods (*oghā*), the bonds (*yogā*), the corruptions (*kilesā*), the attachments (*upādānā*), the latent tendencies (*anusayā*), the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*), whatever way you want to describe the cravings that need abandoning as per the Buddha's truth number two.

At the end of the day, *jhāna* is nothing special...

Question 47: *Okay. You have spoken much about the *jhānas* and presented them as not a state of deep meditative absorption. Your first experience of the first *jhāna* was not even in a traditional sitting cross-legged position. So is it therefore possible to get into *jhāna* in other positions? or in the midst of daily activities?*

Answer 47: I don't have an answer to this question yet. I'm asking myself could I experience *jhāna* in different situations in life and not only as I do now just by sitting on a cushion? I already know I can experience it while sitting on a chair in a very casual fashion. I'm going to work on experiencing it why I am lying down. I'm saying that because I may in some months time be the subject of a study that involves using fMRI which is a machine where your brain is scanned to see what areas of the brain are active when you do something. I would really like to be in *jhāna* while I have this kind of study done on my brain. In this situation you have to be lying down on your back so I'm going to practice dwelling in *jhāna* while I am lying down on my back. I don't think it will be that difficult. This is still a meditative situation. Now walking meditation, I'm not too sure as I don't do it at the moment but it should be possible for me to try and see if yes it is possible to dwell in *jhāna* while doing walking meditation.

The next thing would be just to experience *jhāna* in daily life. The key thing again to enter *jhāna* is the abandonment of the five hindrances. Having now permanently abandoned the five hindrances I don't have to

do anything to be without them in all life situations, so I could say that I am potentially in a *jhāna* situation all the time. What is also needed is to experience the various qualities that are in the four *jhānas*: *pīti*, *sukha*, *upekkhā*, sometimes *vitakka* and *vicāra* to allow discerning in which of the four *jhānas* one is in. I guess it's more easy to notice these when you are in a meditative type of situation but potentially it could be possible, for example I experience often *sukha* in my daily life. *pīti*, joy or for me now contentment, is almost always there in me. Would I then say that when I am experiencing *sukha* in my daily life that I am in *jhāna*? Why not! At the end of the day, *jhāna* is nothing special. We make it something so big because it seems to be so difficult to attain and of course it was but once it is there then it's nothing special. Again you don't go into any special mental state. You are just a normal functioning human being but with a certain number of qualities which are in you when in *jhāna*. Potentially you can experience *jhāna* all the time. For instance I'm just experiencing *sukha* right now while I'm talking to you, but could I say that I'm in *jhāna*? My overall state is not fundamentally different to what I experience when I am sitting on my cushion so I may be in *jhāna* right now! I reckon this needs a bit more investigation. When I speak, when I move my body, whatever, do these activities prevent me to dwell in *jhāna*?

Dealing with boredom: All moments are equal...

Question 48: *Let's talk about a different thing: the feeling of boredom. Because the feeling of boredom and the need for stimulation is a very powerful negative feeling in ordinary humans which motivates us for a change. Would you say that you are free from this feeling of boredom? Would you be able to just sit in one place and not do anything at all for a long time? Would it bother you? You have stated in other occurrences that you still listen to music or read books. Why?*

Answer 48: As I said before I'm full of desires (laughing) but not full of cravings! You know, the end of suffering has to be replaced automatically, without having to do anything, by things like joy, happiness and pleasure. We experience in life these things due to our personal history, in some situations, like watching certain type of movies, listening to some type of music, or doing some activities physical or mental. All these things are a source of pleasure, joy and happiness. Again this *sutta* (SN 36.31) I keep mentioning which says that there are these three types of pleasure: the pleasure of the five senses, the pleasure of *jhāna* and the pleasure of having realised *nibbāna* and it does not say that any of these pleasures has to be avoided. So experiencing pleasure of the five senses is okay.

Boredom was one of my big hindrances which I developed when in my teens. I could spend hours of not knowing what to do with myself and suffering for that. The flip side of boredom of course is a craving, craving for having excitement, for having joy, happiness and pleasure. I didn't experience boredom for many years after my teens because I was making sure I kept busy. Instead I developed workaholicism to make sure that I was always occupied so I will have no time to feel bored. Since I retired six years go, I thought about this issue. Will I feel bored because now I am not going to occupy myself with work 8 to 10 hours a day? I realised then that I could have a bit of a fear of boredom. The fear of the fear or the fear of an aversion, that I mentioned before. Because I have this long established habit of reviewing my day at the end and in my meditation before going to bed, I came to realise that my days are always full. First I don't have to do anything for the time to pass, it's just passing. Second because I have a positive attitude about everything then the day is filled up with plenty of very good things happening. I don't need to make a special effort to occupy my time such as I'm not going to experience boredom.

Meanwhile I'm not preventing myself of doing things that I can enjoy and experience pleasure of the senses. Reading a book, practising the piano, playing golf, flying, going for a walk, whatever and meditating of course are done but not for the purpose of not experiencing boredom. But I have clearly at the back of my mind the knowledge that if I find myself in one moment of my life where I have nothing to do at all, I will still have a perfect moment, because all moments are equal.

All moments are equal, is a very important concept that I didn't have before where I was dreaming about the future good moments of life like having dinner with a friend that was, at the time, helping me cope with an unpleasant present moment. That was day dreaming. I have completely stopped day dreaming, stopped choosing a moment from another one. This is a very important aspect of living in total equanimity. Back to my favourite quote from the Sutta Nipata: "Dry up the remains of your past. Have nothing for your future. Don't be attached to the present. You will go from place to place in peace" which implies peace from moment to moment.

The role of the ego...

Question 49: *There seems to be a mixup regarding the notion of "Self" in Buddhism. It seems there are many mixed up concepts which are not necessarily the same. For example: "ego", feeling of "mine", "Self" as a personality, "selfishness", self as "feeling of being myself". How do you relate to the issue of self?*

Answer 49: As you indicate there is a bit of misunderstanding around this issue. I think that what the Buddha was trying to say is: don't be attached to anything. And in particular don't be attached to the five khandhas, the stuff which make what is called a sentient being. There is nothing permanent here that you can attach to, resulting in this craving that you have for becoming or sometimes the opposite because you are so upset about life that you want to not become. Regarding the "Self", the craving for becoming is the issue. But the Buddha never said: "There is no self." But he said: look at, investigate. It's a very good practice in fact to use the first component of the 8FP, developing a complete view about the self.

In modern terminology we talk more about the ego, psychotherapists use the word ego. Regarding the ego it's a question I ask the people who are attending the *dhamma* courses I give here and there, I ask them: "When did you notice your ego for the first time in your life?" Some answers: "I am not sure, maybe some years ago." It's clear that the ego is a creation of mind which happened basically the first time a child is experiencing usually an unpleasant situation and he wants to react to the situation by projecting an image to the world. That's the role of the ego. The role of the ego is to project a certain image of yourself to the world. And the image you project is basically about the things you like and the things you don't like. Here we are back talking about the three poisons: we project our cravings, our aversions, our delusions. It is around the age of 18 months that children usually start projecting an ego. It's very important to notice that before that they did not "have" an ego, which means that the ego is definitely a creation of the mind.

The challenge we now have is to let go of this creation of the mind. But you don't succeed abandoning your ego as result of knowing that it is a creation of the mind. No, you have to do the work of abandoning your cravings and your aversions, and in doing so, automatically the ego goes because you don't have anything more that you need to or you want to project to the world. So the ego is not something that you work on directly, again it is the byproduct of transforming yourself, abandoning your cravings. It's quite amazing that so many aspects of the practical *dhamma* are the byproduct of doing the job of perfecting *sila* which means abandoning greed, hatred and delusion, nothing else. And everything will fall into place. Once you have done that then suddenly this concept of an ego, a self, whatever you want to call it disappears.

I have absolutely no interest about discussing about my "self". I'm happy to talk about the things I like, for example if we want to talk about music, I'd say I like classical music, I like Schubert in particular, if we talk about jazz I would say, I like it and blues in particular, I in fact like all kind of music which has a bit of a bluesy style, so I'm happy to talk about it but I'm not projecting any self through that. I am not attached to all the things I like. Because I don't have this kind of attitude I'm open to anything, so if somebody mentions a musician he likes, I'm happy to discover. I'm happy to try anything new, there is no issue there of feeling threatened by someone else likes and dislikes.

Fundamentally that's the issue, your ego is a creation of your mind with the purpose of projecting a certain image of yourself and that is the big challenge, the image that we want to project to the world is always changing. We have this silly situation where we put out an image and we want the world to straightaway recognise it as: this is me, I am this guy. That's a total delusion. Then we change our vision of ourself, and then we project something else and we want the world again to change its perception of ourself in real time. When you have abandoned the three poisons you're not projecting anything, there is no intention at all regarding defending your cravings or avoiding some aversions.

The sense of I ...

Question 50: *Okay so maybe let's talk about the feeling of I. This is the basic feeling that accompanies our experience and activity. For example, I know that I am doing something or that I am experiencing something or in your case right now that you are tasting some drink, tea or coffee. Is this feeling still present in you because some interpretations of Buddhism wonder whether this feeling is completely gone in an awakened person?*

Answer 50: I'm quite happy to say I, me, in conversation but without any attachment, it is a convention. It's a way of saying okay I'm talking about this thing here so people know, okay he is talking about himself. In term of how I perceive myself today, I've not fundamentally changed, I am a separate sentient being from other sentient beings, that's clear. This concept that we are all together, all united as one, yeah okay at the particle level, at the quantum physic level, there is no separation between things, but there are layers of things in physics, the quantum physics represents a very low level layer, nature has progressively built other layers, as a result of that you have, for a while, temporarily of course, objects such as sentient beings which are relatively independent from other objects. When I am saying something not the whole world is speaking what I'm saying, it's just me speaking.

Again it's all about craving. Do I have a strong sense of I? Do I want again to defend this I to the world? Absolutely not! I have nothing to project. As my favourite *sutta* says: "I have nothing for my future." This I, I've no idea what's going to happen to it, I don't mind, I really don't care. But conventionally I'm quite happy to say yes I am this, I am doing this, I'm doing that, I'm flying in a wind tunnel, I'm playing the piano, but there is no attachment there.

I think there was a lot of conceptualisation that occurred after the Buddha. I think a lot of misinterpretation came because the standard formulation of the twelve links of dependent origination starts with ignorance, many traditions have put the twelve links as the pinnacle of the *dhamma*, and have concluded that if dependent origination starts with ignorance then we need to replace ignorance by knowledge and that this knowledge will break all the links as result of that. No, unfortunately that's not true, as I discussed before, knowledge is not enough for removing ignorance. What counts is the implication of ignorance, the implication of delusion. I prefer the world delusion instead of ignorance, that's the point in fact. If you use the word ignorance, for the third poison, then people think: "Oh I have to acquire knowledge." If you use the word delusion, the people would say: "Oh no, I have to do something else." They come to realise that the consequence of being deluded is making them go for a craving or an aversion or a fear.

And then you realise, "Oh, I don't have to work on that illusion. I have to work again on my cravings, my fears and my aversions, then my illusion will go away." Again, trying to replace illusion with knowledge is putting the cart before the horse and it is the challenge for us to understand that the true insight that is the end of illusion will only happen after the abandonment of the effects of this same illusion, the abandonment of all cravings.

Oneness with the universe?...

Question 51: *Okay another connected topic, certain meditators or people who experiment with psychedelic substances speak about the special state where there are some merging of barriers between Self and the world. There is a feeling of unity being in a state of oneness with it. Did you or do you experience such things?*

Answer 51: I am experiencing a great connection with everything around me, sentient being, nature, whatever. I feel a very strong connection with all of these, I want to open up and communicate more and more with people and in particular share my realisation with others and hopefully inspire them to do the same. I'm not interested going into a cave and finishing my life there, isolating myself from the universe, not at all. I want to really be involved in the daily lives of people, but there is no sense of oneness that some people talk about which may be an emotional state happening to them when they are in meditative or induced state of consciousness.

The mind is capable of going into so many different states, maybe the *Abhidhamma* lists these different states of the mind. A lot of them are far from being fully understood, so I'm not having a strong opinion such as, "no, this is not possible, this feeling of oneness," but I have not experienced any of that. I have never taken any mind altering drugs, except alcohol and smoking but not to an extreme. I may have been drunk less than ten times in my whole life and I stopped drinking alcohol and wine 17 years ago. I never took any drugs so I never went into some trips as described in the 60s around the world in particular in the US and no I didn't have any of these trips. For some reason and I would say, per chance, I was not attracted to them. Not being myself if I could say, with a mind altered by something does not interest me. I'm not looking for experiencing trips of any kind. I'm happy to experience things like flying but I'm not interested experimenting with mind altering substances while what I consider is essential is to transform oneself in order to realise *nibbāna*. *nibbāna* is not described as one having a different mind, it's the same mind but purified with no more greed, hatred and delusion.

How much thinking in your everyday life? ...

Question 52: *Does thinking still occur in your everyday life? Do you have a need for conscious thinking?*

Answer 52: Very little. I am amazed and I really enjoy just doing what I have to do while thinking nothing, just being totally into the thing I'm doing. For example this morning I was helping my wife with some kitchen duties, I had to peel apples. I was just peeling apples. I was totally in the peeling of the apples without thoughts about something else or verbalisation around the activity of peeling apples. I'm really conscious of having a mind at peace.

One question I ask of people I'm presenting the *dhamma* is: "How much of yourself are you in control of?" Some people say 100%, some 20%, or any number. I reply: "If you were 100% in control of yourself then you'll be dead in next millisecond!" Because, let's consider your body, your body is doing billion of processes that you have no control of. If you had to control consciously you heart rate, your blood pressure, your immune system, your digestive system and so on and so on you will be dead in the next millisecond. So you have no control of your body. If anything you can do with your body is to help the body to function well by being an environment with good air, with feeding it with good food, not too much, by sleeping well, by exercising, by, very importantly, going to the toilet to let go of the things that were useful to you for a while but are not any more.

So that's for the body, now what about the mind? When you have a thought popping up in your mind, is it you who has produced this thought? No, it just pops up. Who has put this thought in your mind? Something from outside? Of course not. It means it's your unconscious self which has done the job of producing a thought. Why did it produce this thought and not another one? Because this particular unconscious process

was happily doing something and suddenly it reached a brick wall. So it decided: "I need the help of the conscious self to help me progress this issue." And that's the opportunity for us to exercise some control. That's the only moment in life where we have control when we have a conscious thought as a result of a contact, either an external contact with one of our five physical senses or a contact in the mind. We have this conscious thought popping up in our mind and that's when we have the possibility to react. That's the only aspect of us that we have control of, how we react to what is going on in real time in our consciousness. Unfortunately we usually don't do a very good job at responding to things popping up in our mind. As a result of that, the underlying process is not happy, he cannot continue his job, so he's going to pop this question again and again until we do a better job at addressing the issue, providing a good answer to the question. By the way, that's how you abandon the three poisons by answering your underlying processes in a skilful way. Once you have done that, then the underlying processes, and there are many of them, are happy, they can continue their job on their own, they don't need the conscious self for functioning. As a result of that your mind is at peace, all the time. So I don't need to have thought in my mind.

Do I think? I think when I have a new task to do. For example I have a little *dhamma* group here and every week we take a topic and I look at the *suttas* related to this topic, I prepare a document that I sent to people in preparation for the discussion. While I'm doing this I think, I'm using my thinking mind but as a recent cognitive science study explains very clearly the thinking is not primarily a conscious activity. It's mostly an unconscious activity with some moment of consciousness, it's called "unconscious information processing." The stream of information popping up in our consciousness when we are thinking makes us believe that we are doing the thinking consciously. No what is happening is that we are following bit by bit, at regular intervals, what the underlying process is doing for us. 99.99% of what's going on within us, body and mind, is unconscious.

At the end of the day I think very little. This is quite amazing because there are some cultures that want you to believe that human beings are there for thinking. Descartes was saying: "I think therefore I am." Now I'm saying: "I'm not thinking therefore I am" because I'm much more present when I'm not thinking, I can be totally with what is happening in the present moment.

Can we master our thoughts? ...

Question 53: *Okay so can we master our thoughts? Should one be passive towards them and just note their presence or rather can one actively direct thoughts?*

Answer 53: Well I think I explained it before. You are not producing your thoughts consciously. Your thoughts are produced by your unconscious processes. If you have trained them, that's the only thing we can do consciously is to train our underlying consciousness by feeding it with the right information. Once you have done that, bit by bit of course, once you have finished the job, then you don't have to feed these underlying processes anymore. The underlying processes are happy to function on their own.

We are creatures of habit. Once you have developed habits, it's difficult to change them, but if you have developed good habits you don't have to change them.

We function mostly without the need to think. Importantly there is no need to occupy the mind with verbalisation.

Now about controlling our thoughts one very important aspect of the 8FP is Skilful Effort, the component number six of the 8FP, in particular the second aspect which is to protect our mind against negative thinking. When you have an unpleasant thought coming into your mind, either you are in a situation quietly at home where you have time to deal with the underlying issue which is causing you to have this unpleasant thought, or, most of the time it's not like that something is happening and you have this thought coming into your

mind, either in your daily life or in your meditation and you don't have the opportunity to deal with the underlying issue so you just have to protect your mind against negative thinking.

We have to develop a technique based on what the Buddha provides us with the second component of Skilful Effort which is to abandon the unpleasant thought occupying the mind. I have used several different techniques, particularly two, to occupy my mind with something gentle so that the unpleasant thought has no chance to occupy my consciousness. One is to do *metta* by sending loving-kindness to myself or whoever I feel sending at the time. By doing a repetitive activity of this kind the mind is busy and in this case it's busy doing something positive which is the third aspect of Skilful Effort as well as the the fourth aspect which is to maintain this positive thinking as long as possible. The second technique which I had been using for years much more frequently is counting as I explained already at the beginning of this interview. This has been a very useful technique for protecting my mind.

That's the way you control the mind. You don't control what is happening, you control your response to what is happening, that's the only control we have.

Is there any sexuality left?

Question 54: *Change topic a bit, what about sexuality? You made a distinction between desire and craving, do you still experience sexual desire? Can you still engage in sexuality?*

Answer 54: Recently when I was revisiting dependant origination I found this very interesting essay by this scholar from Poland named Joanna Jurewicz where she proposes, quite convincingly, that dependant origination is the way for the Buddha to answer to the Hindu creation myth which starts with ignorance and that's why the twelve links start with ignorance. Sorry I'm shifting a bit. In her essay she talks about: "craving for another person constitutes the basis of sexual activity." I found this statement quite pertinent to your question.

Can we have a sexual relationship with someone without craving? I'm not sure. The thing is now I'm not having any craving for sexual activity with someone. When I see a beautiful woman, I just see a beautiful woman, of course she is beautiful to me because of my canon of beauty but I have no attraction, no desire, no craving for having a sexual activity with her. That's very very nice because now I can have contact with many young people without having any issue. I could look at beautiful people, being with beautiful people without having this little thing at the back of the mind: "Hmm I could have something with her, that would be nice", no, it's not happening at all. There is no craving for having sexual activity with someone.

Having a sexual relationship, the physical activity of making love to someone requires thought and consideration and some dedication if we want it to be successful. As I discussed earlier, it's also true for preparing a good meal and so on, you have to put a lot of energy into that in order to be successful. I could imagine, possibly, potentially, an *arahant* making love with another *arahant* because both of them having no craving they will just experience one of the three pleasures that the Buddha mentioned in that *sutta* (SN 36.31) I mention all the time: pleasure of the five senses. By becoming an *arahant* you are not abandoning the pleasure of the five senses. The pleasure of the sex is recognised by human beings as being one of the biggest pleasure a human being can experience. I could imagine that an *arahant* could experience sexual pleasure with another person but in order to be able to have no issue with craving, I think the best way would be that he or she does it with another *arahant*. This is a complete, potentially silly, theory, I have absolutely no experience of that and I'm not interested really to look for, to wait for another *arahant* to come around. No, absolutely not. I said before it has been some thirteen years that I have had no sexual relationship with my wife and it's quite alright. We are still very much in love and very close to each other but now there is no need for a sexual relationship.

Can you do the job while being busy living a normal life? ...

Question 55: *Much of your self-transformation came about in a period of much stability in your life after you retired. Do you think it will be possible to self transform for a person who does not have the stability? For example his job requires constant planning, evaluation, making difficult decisions and choices, difficult negotiations, making social compromises with other humans, getting into debt, would it still be possible?*

Answer 55: Yeah, don't make *nibbāna* conditioned (laughing)! What I mean by that is that all moments in life are an opportunity for discovering where we are and knowing what we have to do to transform ourselves towards the realisation of *nibbāna*. The fact that you are in some circumstances can help but it's not a fundamental thing. The important thing is that you have no doubt that, again, you need to abandon the three poisons. In many moments of our life we will have things happening to us which would push buttons in us that we need, first, to become aware of and, second, make a decision to "unscrew" these buttons so that there will be no unskilful reaction the next time we face similar situations. The fact that you are a business person or retired doesn't make a huge difference. Because if you fundamentally live a conscious life where you really pay attention to what's going on every moment of your life and you make note, (written notes are very important,) make note of what is going on every day of your life, that's why I advise people to do a meditation at the end of their day to review their day and take note of the good things which have happened and to take note of the less good things which have happened and then have a very committed program, method of transforming themselves and abandoning bit by bit the things that they have discovered in them that need to be transformed.

It's quite nice to see the people coming to my *dhamma* group, communicating about the *dhamma* and how they apply it in their daily life while facing whatever situation at work, at home or wherever, trying to apply the *dhamma* in their life.

In my case, in the seven years since I retired, I felt that I needed to spend a lot of time learning and dusting off the *dhamma*. I decided to apply my skills, my intelligence, the skills I developed as an engineer to fully understand the *dhamma* in its practical aspects. That's why I progressively read all the 11800 *suttas*. In them, I looked at what was really useful by applying the *Kalama sutta* approach which is: to take onboard the things that work, that produce good results for oneself and others and put aside the concepts are unproductive. Progressively I came across a certain number aspects of the *dhamma*, in fact things found in some *suttas* which I now believe were not part of the original teaching of the Buddha, that were not useful for doing the job of removing the three poisons. I decided to ignore these aspects. So I put them aside.

Yes, I had more time, since I retired to do all these studies but when I look at the past 17 years of being with the *dhamma* before being retired, I was also spending quite a bit of energy in meditation, in retreats, in studying, in communication with other people committed to the *dhamma* and so on. The thing is that my path at the time was a zigzag, I wasn't on a straight line because there was so much impractical information given to me about the *dhamma* from both traditions I followed, until I decided to abandon them, but it took me time to that. Today I have a full knowledge and understanding of what works what is practically useful in the *dhamma* and I do what the future Buddha did which is to go his own way.

When I started 27 years ago, if I had learned what I know today I would've done it much more quickly, say, maybe in 6 or 7 years instead of 27. If you really know to put into practice the useful bits of the *dhamma* you can do it in 5, 6 years, no worries. For some people in even less time if they have received very little trauma growing up, so they don't have much work to do for drying up the remains of the past and follow the rest of the path. So there is no real issue of whatever situation you are in. Of course if you find yourself in a war zone like Syria today, that's not the best situation for practicing the *dhamma*, discovering the *dhamma* to start with and practising the *dhamma* and realising *nibbāna*. Fortunately there are a lot of people who are on this earth, in relatively good conditions for more than just surviving, many environments are good enough but the issue is to find the true *dhamma* that will work for you.

Some qualities can be developed via a practice, some cannot ...

Question 56: *You have many times emphasised that several elements of the Buddha path are not practised but they are naturally and automatically developed as a byproduct of removing taṇhā. Can you therefore summarise what elements could be practised, what is the actual practice and what elements are not practicable but are the results of something else?*

Answer 56: I did a spreadsheet gathering all the qualities that you can find in the *dhamma* to see which ones, I have two columns, one for the qualities of the *dhamma* that we can develop directly and the other column for the qualities of the *dhamma* that will be developed indirectly. There are a lot of the ones that you can do directly. For example: investigation of the *dhamma*, examining the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, learning to abandon *taṇhā*, right livelihood, moderation in eating, being modest, developing morality, right speech (a very important quality), abiding to the five precepts, being very attuned with *dukkha*, notice impermanence, putting intentions in place in particular renunciation, and many more. So there are many aspects of the *dhamma* that can be practiced directly and the most important one is abandoning the five hindrances. Abandoning the five hindrances require conscious effort by applying oneself to the task.

In the list of aspects of the *dhamma* that you don't "do" directly it includes: *nibbāna*, you don't do *nibbāna*, you don't become an *arahant* just by wanting, again these are the result of abandoning the three poisons. *samatha* - calm/tranquility of the body and mind are also the byproduct of transforming yourself. The *jhānas*, of course, are not done but experienced as a result of abandoning *taṇhā*. Equanimity which, for me, is the sign for the end of the path, as the seventh factor of awakening, when the equanimity of *jhāna* 3 and *jhāna* 4 spills into your daily life, constantly, that's the sign you have finished the job. Equanimity is not something you do, it's a forced situation when you do that, it does not last. Joy/*pīti* is not something you can force yourself to experience, it will last few seconds, that's all.

Attention/*sati* is also a byproduct of transforming yourself. You can practice *sati* by doing some meditation like *ānāpānasati* where you focus on the breath, try to stay focused on the breath and if the mind goes wandering take notice and come back to the breath. You can train your mind a bit with this practice but again it's a forced situation, the real *sati* is when you stay present with what is without having to do anything and this happens when you have the peaceful mind of a transformed person who has abandoned the three poisons. Same for happiness/pleasure/*sukha* and wisdom/*paññā*.

Wisdom is not something you do, again it's the result of transforming yourself and naturally experiencing *samatha*. The flip side of *samatha*, *vipassanā*/insight pops up when it decides to come because you need to have the mind silent in order to have true insight. You need to have abandoned the five hindrances in order to have true insight. Interestingly modern cognitive science says that: "It seems that the processes that yield insights do not require conscious awareness." Conclusion: insight is not a practice.

It's important to differentiate between those qualities that we can develop through a practice and the ones for which a practice will be a waste of time. Unfortunately, again, I think the Buddhist traditions have emphasised meditation practices for qualities that cannot be developed directly.

Is Dependent Origination crucial for liberation? ...

Question 57: *There are many suttas which state that dependent origination is absolutely crucial for liberation and they present it as the central discovery of the Buddha in the way: "Who sees dependent origination sees the dhamma. He who sees dependent origination sees the dhamma." In your testimony so*

far there has been little or no mention of it. Does it feature in anyway in your experience of self transformation?

Answer 57: Over the years I have been studying this topic of Dependent Origination (DO), both in the *Mahāyāna* and the *Theravada* traditions. I can tell you that it has been for a very long time a very confusing topic. I started to talk about it just a few minutes ago. The essay from Joanna Jurewicz has been very enlightening for me. The way the Buddha presents the traditional twelve links is a way of answering the creation myth found in the vedas. I was always asking myself: "Why does dependent origination start with ignorance?" Because for ignorance to exist there are many pre-conditions for it to happen. The universe has to be there. So DO was really challenging to me. Anyway DO has different presentations in the *suttas*. It is not only the 12 links, there are several lists, one with just two links. One of them starts with the component of the second truth: craving. For me this other formulation is much more meaningful because it is becoming much more practical. Realising that craving is the cause of my suffering and of the following links. So yes, if I work on my craving it will definitely have an effect and all the links will eventually break down.

Instead people are looking at the 12 links starting with ignorance and they say okay I need to break the links there. And then they say, how do I remove ignorance, by knowledge. Okay I'm going to study. Unfortunately understanding is only part of the answer. I think the traditions have emphasised dependent origination as result of not knowing what to do with the Eighth-fold-path. Having lost this fundamental aspect of the *dhamma* which is, how to practically use the 8FP for abandoning the three poisons, traditions have developed a new approach which is: we have to abandon ignorance so lets develop knowledge.

For me the 12 links, as proposed by the Buddha, was a way of making us realise that everything is in the form of processes. That there is nothing solid, concrete. Everything is a set of processes caused by some preconditions and that if one essential condition is not there then the depending process will not eventuate. Realising the dependencies between these processes is a very important thing because at the time of the Buddha there were people believing that there was no such thing as dependencies, no responsibility for our actions, etc. Instead the Buddha clearly said that we are responsible for our intentional actions.

Also and very importantly, the 12 links is a way of realising as everything is like a process, there is nothing to which one can attach a self. The 12 links demonstrate that there is no permanent self, nor soul. At the time of the Buddha as today in many traditions there is this concept of soul which would like us to believe that there is in us something solid, permanent which is going to be there for ever.

For me, the 12 links is more an intellectual aspect of the *dhamma* rather than a practical aspect. How do you practically use the 12 links for abandoning *taṇhā*? I have no answer to this question. Instead use the 8FP and yes, that will do the job. The 12 links will give you a bit of intellectual understanding of what this universe is about. Maybe the 12 links could be seen as the quantum physics aspect of the *dhamma*.

Is insight into non-self a crucial element? ...

Question 58: *So do you see also insight into non-self in a similar way more as a theory, because there are many suttas which see liberation as a consequence of insight into non-self/anatta? One for example sees the five khandhas, the six sense bases, the four elements as non-self then because of that he becomes disenchanted then comes dispassion and his mind becomes released. You present your self transformation and doing the job in a different way. So how would you relate to this concept that insight into non-self is a crucial element for liberation?*

Answer 58: Again for me this is purely an intellectual thing. Modern psychology has come to the same conclusion as the Buddha that there is no permanent self in us sentient beings. Accepting this idea is purely intellectual. It's a concept saying, okay I am now aware that there is nothing permanent there. Fine, but again knowledge about something doesn't remove the emotional aspect of it. Even if you know intellectually that

there is not a self does it automatically remove the desire to be eternal, to be always around? You have to work on other aspects, this knowledge will not remove your cravings.

The craving for becoming is not going to be abandoned just by knowing that we are impermanent. We have to work on the emotional aspect of the thing. Starting with: why do we have this craving in the first place? Then deal with the underlying causes for our craving. For me the knowledge of the impermanence of the self is not a direct line to *nibbāna*. If we were not emotional beings I could accept the idea.

The thing is that the formula that you are mentioning from the *suttas* is a stock formula. You find this aspect of the gradual path, in this case the end of the path, repeated in many *suttas* here and there. Is it the original presentation that the Buddha did? That's a question. For me it was easier to memorise *suttas* by using one of the stock phrases like this one without realising the implications for future readers.

What is the role of the other meditative states and the Brahmavihārās? ...

Question 59: *Another topic of similar type. You have spoken very much about the four jhānas and their role in doing the job. What about these other meditative states described in the suttas, the four arūpas or formless states, cessation of perception and feeling or the four Brahmavihārās, the so-called divine abidings? What is your take on these states?*

Answer 59: Quite different for the first two and the last one. The first two, particularly the first one which I don't call *arūpas* I call them *samāpattis*. These four attainments are the attainments that the future Buddha learned from his two teachers. He quickly became very good at them and each teacher in turn wanted him to teach with them but the future Buddha said: "No, that's not good enough. This does not remove my *dukkha*." So he moved on. He moved on once, he moved on twice. In the end he abandoned these *samāpattis*.

I now have a question. What could be the reason to re-insert into the *dhamma* the *samāpattis* that he has rejected before he became the Buddha? The difference was for him that after having tried these attainments he tried very ascetic practices he came to realise, this is a waste of time as this is not removing my *dukkha*. Then he remembered, what for me was his stream-entry moment, when he had his first *jhāna*. I consider this as the stream-entry event of the future Buddha because at that moment he removes doubt about the path to awakening. From there he went into a totally new and different path than everybody else. Why will he reintroduce later on these practices that he had rejected before, for not being good enough for realising *nibbāna*? There are a certain number of *suttas* where you find these four *samāpattis* as a progression after the four *jhānas*. But most importantly they are not found in very important *suttas* such as DN 2 where the Buddha talks to a King about the benefits of the spiritual life. This would have been the perfect place for reinforcing that, yes, after the four *jhānas* you have to do the four *samāpattis* and eventually the cessation of perception and feelings (*nirodha*), but no, he didn't! There are many *suttas* that talk about *jhāna*, several hundreds of them where there is no mention of the *samāpattis* and of *nirodha*.

My interpretation of this situation is that a certain number of *suttas* were given to some monks or nuns for them to memorise and pass on from generation to generation and in some cases these people came from the Hindu tradition, they were already trained in these *samāpattis* and decided to put them into the *suttas* of the Buddha. And where to put them if not after the *jhānas*? If you study these *suttas* you realise that there was no other place to put them. This has caused the huge misunderstanding in some *Theravada* circles which is that *jhāna* must be a concentration activity in preparation for more concentration activities, the *samāpattis*.

Today we found this discrepancy between these *suttas*, not that many by the way, and the other *suttas* that present the *jhāna* on their own without anything after. Finally, and this is the main thing, the *samāpattis* and the *nirodha* are not in the Eight-fold-path, there are not in the 7 factors of awakening, they are not in the 37 wings of awakening as listed in the *mahāvagga* section of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, while the four *jhānas* are

part of the 8FP and of the 7 factors of awakening, the *samādhī* component. All scholars, including monks and nuns, agree that nobody know what these states are for. So if we don't know what they are for, let's apply the *Kalama sutta* approach, which is: is it useful? Is it going to produce the goods? Am I going to realise *nibbāna* with these things? If you are not convinced then don't practice them. Luckily I didn't go into any of these practices. In the end I didn't need them and I'm quite happy of not having wasted my time trying these practices.

The *Brahmavihārās* is another story although they are also not part of the 37 wings. For me I highly consider the 1st one, *metta*. I don't agree with the *Mahāyāna* tradition emphasis on the 2nd one, compassion, as this emotion can have some dangerous side effects: too much compassion you can get burn out. The third one, sympathetic joy, of course rejoicing for the goods happening to others is a very natural thing to do, thanks to the mirror neurones that sentient beings have, not only human beings. I don't see the need for much practice to develop this one once you have committed yourself to non-ill-will. The four one, equanimity, for me is not a practice as we discussed before, equanimity, the end of the path, is the by product of something else.

The first one, *metta*, is definitely a very good practice that I have been doing for many years and that I continue doing. The attitude of, opening our heart, sending good wishes to ourself and many sentient beings in this universe is a very good practice because it gives us a positive point of view and attitude to the universe and it's a good tool, as I mentioned before, to protect our mind against negativity, part of the 6th component of the 8FP, Skilful Effort. The only aspect of the *Brahmavihārās* I consider very useful as a practice is *metta*.

The end of the world ...

Question 60: *Cessation of perception and feeling is one thing but there is also a group of text in the suttas which put much emphasis on the notion of cessation, nirodha, in itself. For example: cessation of form, cessation of perception, cessation of contact. Stopping or cessation of consciousness, and also the related concept of going to the end of the world. Do such states feature in your experience? What is your opinion about this whole layer of texts, of these ideas?*

Answer 61: What is the world and what is the cessation of the world? It is an important question. The world is defined by the Buddha as the result of what's going on with our six sense bases. So the cessation of the world has to do with what's going on with our six senses. But it doesn't mean cessation of all the aspects of the khandhas which are as result of contact, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. You don't need to have cessation of them completely for good. What you need to have is to abandon the search for a *nimitta*, the looking for of *nimitta* associated with all these contacts between external objects and our five senses or internal objects and our mind. You are no more aiming for something pleasant to be grabbed at or unpleasant to be rejected. You are dispassionate about the world. You have no more delusions about it, no more dream about certain realities, disenchantments, you see things just as they are. That's all. *nirodha*, cessation is the cessation of delusion about all aspects of the universe. That's for me going to the end of the world.

Can I be self-deluded in believing that I am an arahant? ...

Question 61: *Many people within Buddhism or even other traditions have claimed that they are awakened. Yet their testimonies are different from one another. Perhaps it cannot be that they are all awakened. It's possible that some are self-deluded. They think they're awakened and they are not. Have you considered, do you consider the possibility that you are self-deluded, for example that you are believing that you are an*

arahant when you are not yet? How could you defend yourself if someone would form such an accusation against you, maybe some traditional Buddhist?

Answer 61: For me the criteria is very simple. Realising *nibbāna* is the result of having abandoned craving as per the second truth. Realising *nibbāna* means that you are not experiencing any *dukkha*. For good. I have some history around that and it is progressive history. Four years ago I started to experience having completely abandoned some of the big cravings, aversions in this case, like anger. Suddenly I found, I cannot be angry anymore. I kept trying to find things which could make me angry and I could not find any. Then progressively other aspects of craving disappeared like irritation, so I came to realise that even something which is unpleasant does not cause me to be irritated and this has been happening for several years now. I have progressively witnessed the three poisons disappear within me. I maintained a spreadsheet with a monthly review tab of my progress in abandoning the 128 fears and aversions and also the other aspects of the *dhamma*. It is amazing to see the evolution over the months and how gradually the 128 items became all green, meaning gone.

Now the last thing to disappear is delusion. Why? Because delusion is not something you can tackle directly. You cannot make a list of your delusions because if you could make such a list you have already abandoned them, because you know that they are not what you think they were. You can make a list of your fears and aversions among 128 of them. You can look at the cravings left, once you have abandoned your fears and aversions which means you have abandoned the flip side of, the cravings associated with fears and aversions. Then few cravings remain as I discussed before: attraction to the other sex form, relationship with food, use of music as mood altering, etc. and you work on them until one day you realise: "Oh, I can enjoy all these things without craving." Then it remains to see if there is any delusion left.

This question you are asking is the ultimate delusion. Am I deluded about where I am? The thing is that delusion is the cause of cravings and aversions. Once you have abandoned the cravings and the aversions this means that you look at things without misunderstanding, without misperceptions, misconception. You look at something and you don't see a *nimitta* there, there is none, and same for all aspects of the six sense bases. The delusion causing cravings and aversions once you have abandoned them is, no delusion left. Does it make sense? Because you see a delusion by its effects. The effect of a delusion is a craving or an aversion. Once you have no more aversions and cravings then you know you have no more delusion.

Anyway, as I said at the beginning to call myself *arahant* is not something really I'm concerned about. Again this has no value for me. We discussed about the self before, the I, the projection of the ego, and so on but you know I'm not going to put a T-shirt saying "I am an *arahant*" and show this image to the world, no. In fact there are few people on earth that I know who are calling themselves *arahant* and now they have to spend the rest of their life defending this position. I'm not interested in that at all that's why I don't want to have this testimony published under my name, I wish it to be anonymous. I have nothing to project. I have no willingness to enter into argument and even discussion with Buddhist people who would like to challenge where they consider I am because of their perception of what *nibbāna* is all about.

Ultimately having someone announce themselves awakened should continue in the same breath by saying: "Because I have abandoned the three poisons" or *āsavas* or whatever term they want to use. Unfortunately some of them that I know who claim they are *arahant* are not claiming at the same time that they have abandoned greed, hatred and delusion, which is what I am claiming. What I claim is not from an intellectual point of view, it is from a practical point of view. For several years that I have not experienced negative reactions like anger, irritation and so on. It's more than a year that I have experienced almost constant happiness and total equanimity all the time. That's what counts. I'm waiting for someone or something to come and push a button in me that I may not realise I still have. I'm not afraid of having this event occurring. In fact once I came to realise, a year ago, that I've done the job I had no doubt that I can be challenged and that nothing will happen. That's the third pleasure again of this *sutta* (SN 36.31) that I keep mentioning where you reflect on where you are and have the pleasure of realising again that the job is done.

Lay or monastic, who has a better chance to do the job? ...

Question 62: *Do you believe that the monks can do this job more easily? Get the job done, become an arahant more easily than lay people? Because this is the traditional view. Actually the traditional view is that lay people cannot achieve this state but your testimony contradicts this view. So what are the benefits if any of being a monk, according to you?*

Answer 62: Yes, for so many years after I joined the *Theravada* tradition I heard this story that you will not become awakened if you don't become a monk! But something at the back of my mind was telling me: "Don't believe that story!" I think it is a bit of a self-serving attitude from the monks.

Being a monastic at the time of the Buddha must have been quite a different experience to what is to be a monastic today. Because at the time of the Buddha you had him and other *arahants* who were able to give you their personal experience in a very practical way for achieving the same (see above discussion about knowing who was what on the path to awakening at the time and after the Buddha). The rules that we are finding today, particularly in the *Theravada* tradition, the *vinaya* rules were not fully in place at the time of the Buddha, many were added later. The life of a mendicant was quite different to the life of monastics now living in monasteries. In fact at the time of the Buddha these people were mainly living outside. They were not living in monasteries. They were gathering during the monsoon season, but otherwise they were living in forest or in nature. They were quite secluded, living in small groups, so it was quite a different environment.

Unfortunately the *dhamma* became a set of religions. Religions establish themselves with institutions, buildings and all the rest and now you have these monasteries. If you want to be a monk or a nun today you have to join a monastery. There are not many monks and nuns who are living today in the middle of a jungle. I know one who is in Sri Lanka. Monks and nuns today live in monasteries.

There is a *Theravada* monastery near by where I live. I know people who have been monks there. They gave me a good insight into what's going on in that monastery and I'm not too impressed. Fundamentally these people are in the frame of the *vinaya* which is: "Don't do this, don't do that," and then they are told to meditate. That's it. There is no training for these monks about how to practically use the 8FP for abandoning the three poisons. That does not exist. That's why I am saying that the traditions are putting the cart before the horse. They make people meditate and that's it.

In the *Theravada* tradition that I know of, if you succeed to do *jhāna* then you are on the path to awakening. And yes you can "do" *jhāna* as I explained before, in long silent retreats where you can temporarily suppress the five hindrances and experience *pīti* and *sukha* then you find yourself in *jhāna* but this is a forced situation, this is not what the job is. The job is to be able to enter *jhāna* without having to do anything which means you have abandoned for good, not suppressed, the five hindrances. Another huge issue in the *Theravada* world is that they are not even "doing" *jhāna* as described in the *suttas*, they are doing the meditative practices described in the *Visuddhimagga* which I discussed before are not *jhāna*.

So I feel these people are doing much suppression. If you see what I mean. The monk friend of mine who has now left the monastery, is still very committed to become awakened and has come to realise that as a lay person he has a better chance in fact to do the job.

Why continue living? ...

Question 63: *Now that you claim to be an arahant, how do you find the desire and motivation to carry on. What keeps you going? Do you have desire to live? Do you not want to enter the final nibbāna, the anupādisesa nibbāna?*

Answer 63: When I was close to finishing the job I was often thinking about the Buddha becoming an awakened person at the age of 35. He lived as a happy person for the following 45 years. He was quite happy to live for that long and if somebody had asked him to stay a bit longer he would have. The reason he wanted to live that long is because he wanted to try to entice other people to achieve the same as what he achieved for himself. From a very self-focused person he suddenly became a very compassionate person. He was keen to transform himself to find the end of suffering, that's why I'm saying he was very self-focused and that's the best thing that we can do, transform ourself, realise *nibbāna* and then make a difference. That's the motivation for staying alive.

Now my approach to living is quite different to what it was before as I don't project any ego. I don't project my cravings and my aversions to the world when I do something. My communication with people which is of course a lot around the *dhamma* is now much more skilful, with no desire for achieving anything but just being a witness and giving people a chance to discover the true *dhamma* and achieve the same thing as I have achieved. That's what motivates me first. The second motivation is also that after 72 years of misery, of suffering, of *dukkha*, I want to enjoy life. It's not too late! You can enjoy life without craving. I want to experience the pleasures offered by the universe for as long as possible, the pleasure of the five senses, the pleasure of *jhāna*, and the pleasure of having realised *nibbāna*. However if this wish for a long life is not happening it is absolutely not a problem.

Some years ago for some reason we had a discussion about ageing with my wife a kind of funny conversation asking: "How long do you want to live?" for some reasons I don't know why I said this number, I said until 104. For years I have been putting in my mind: "I'm going to live until 104." Of course I can die tomorrow and I don't mind. Recently I was mentioning this to a good friend who follows some Hindu tradition and he said: "No, no, you should aim for 108 not 104!" Me: "Oh, 108. Why is that?" Because in his tradition 108 is a very auspicious number. If you go to YouTube you will find this Indian guy talking about the importance of 108. Although I don't agree with his arguments, after all the universe is so big I'm sure you can find some relationship between any number and some distances between celestial bodies, I am now aiming for living to 108 which gives me an additional 35 years of life. Do you know why I chose 108? It's because I realised that 108 equals two power of two times three power of three and I found it very nice. It satisfies my mathematically inclined mind. Anyway if I succeed to live until 2055 I may have the chance to see the effects of this testimony and my activities as an *arahant* in this world. Just out of curiosity.

Rebirth ...

Question 64: *Buddhists speak much about liberation in terms of being free from rebirth, free from future reincarnations. You already told us that you don't remember your past lives. So does the issue of reincarnation feature in anyway in your experience of self transformation?*

Answer 64: When I discovered Buddhism 27 years ago in both the *Mahāyāna* and the *Theravada* traditions, rebirth was definitely something which was presented as a concept I should believe in. For many years this concept was not really something I was convinced about until 6, 7 years ago when I decided to do a bit of research. I discovered that there was a guy in the USA, Professor Ian Stevenson who spent his whole career researching cases of children who were remembering past lives. I read a book by Ian's successor, Jim Tucker, called "Return to life". I was quite impressed particularly with the case of this little boy from a Christian family in the USA, who remembered the death of an American pilot at the end of WWII.

I know anyway that there are many things in this universe that cannot be explained so even with rebirth there is no way to explain how this universe has produced the ability for it to occur. Even if I don't understand how it happens, the probability for it to happen has now become very strong in me. Today rebirth is something I consider true. But again it's a concept. What is the effect of this concept on the task of abandoning the three poisons? That's the question again: "Is it useful for me to believe in rebirth for allowing the abandoning of one aspect or another of the three poisons?" In the end, no. That's why I tell people, you don't have to worry about believing or not believing in rebirth, this does not affect the job that needs to be done. Rebirth is not something that fundamental. For me, about the *dhamma*, the belief aspect is negligible. The *dhamma* is about putting into practice the components which are useful for realising *nibbāna* as result of abandoning *taṇhā*.

Death and what after? ...

Question 65: *What is your attitude towards your own death?*

Answer 65: Thanks to the Tibetan tradition of doing analytical meditation by taking a topic and meditating on it for one hour, I lost my fear of death 26 years ago (by the way I consider this type of practice to be developing the 1st component of the 8FP that I called : complete view). Still true today, I have absolutely no fear of death, even no concern of any kind. I have this intention of living as long as possible but if I was dying the next millisecond then that's okay. I have absolutely no issue with that. I don't have any conceptual point of view about what's going to happen to this thing conventionally called me after it dies. I do understand why the Buddha was not answering the question about what happens to an *arahant* after death because it is a wrongly formulated question. I see myself as a set of processes which are currently active. This set was not existing 73 years ago. It appeared, will continue to exist for a while longer and then will disappear. I don't need to talk about it in terms of eternity or its opposite annihilation, no there is just a process coming, staying for while, decaying and disappearing. The leftover, if any, no idea what's going to happen.

Question 66: *So you have no fear that you, for example, will no longer exist?*

Answer 66: Absolutely. You completely loose concern of any kind about yourself. You know when we say that an *arahant* has no fear, there is none, nothing at all of any kind, even the smallest concern.

Question 67: *If you were told that you were to die tomorrow would that disturb you?*

Answer 67: Oh no, absolutely not. As I said, next second I'm dead and that's okay (laughing). I'm not wishing it but if it happens, it happens. When the *sutta* says: "You move from place to place in peace" it means, you live from moment to moment in peace. This moment is perfect, the next moment is perfect, the moment of my death is perfect. That's it. That's peace, that's equanimity.

Final message ...

Question 67: *We are reaching the end of the interview. It has been enthralling, quite a testimony. By a way of conclusion, do you have some final words, some final message you would like to state or emphasise, something to end this testimony, this interview?*

Answer 67: The work to be done is neither mysterious nor impossible. What is difficult for us human beings is to be on the right track. Once we're on the right track, nothing will stop us. This is why I like to describe myself in this testimony as a "gardener who weeded the dhamma". I went to the dhamma garden. I found a lot of weeds there. In order to progress in my walk on this path, I had to clean it up on my own. I have successfully done it. I have now reached the end of the road. The purpose of this testimony is to help people realise that in this 21st century that we find ourselves in, there is still this working path to freedom that the

Buddha opened for himself and then made available to us. The trip is magnificent. As the Buddha clearly said: the path to enlightenment is a path full of joy, happiness and pleasure until one attains a happiness which is almost constant. I would like to end by reaffirming that it is quite possible to realise *nibbāna*. It has little to do with our circumstances, it is essential to discover the really useful and practical sides of the *dhamma*, to set up our intentions to free ourselves, to let go of our cravings one by one while maintaining the effort and the confidence in the *dhamma* and oneself to achieve the task: abandoning *taṇhā* and realising *nibbāna*.

Postscript

The Buddha cleared the path that leads to realising *nibbāna*. During the past 2500 years a lot of weeds accumulated on that path making it very difficult to travel and to achieve what the Buddha did. The wheel of the *dhamma* needed a bit of oiling in order to turn smoothly again. Having cleared the path for himself, the “garden path cleaner” decided to offer this testimony as a way of reopening the path for all to enjoy.

The preceding interview was conducted in 2020 by a Buddhist scholar who is also a *dhamma* practitioner.

The intention of this testimony is to demonstrate that although one may experience quite a bit of suffering at the beginning of his life, it is still possible today to realise *nibbāna* in our life time.

nibbāna is the end of suffering, which is never to come back. As result one will live the rest of one’s life in equanimity and experiencing a lot of joy, happiness and pleasure (i.e. of the five senses, of *jhāna*, of being free).

Dear reader, may this testimony inspire you to embrace the *dhamma*, transform yourself and realise *nibbāna* in your life time.

Note: this testimony has now been published on a blog: <https://awakening-in-the-21st-century.blog/>
If you wish to communicate with me please go to the website and use the comment form.

The following pages present a summary of the process of transformation using the Buddha’s Four Truths. The Four Truths include the Eight-Fold-Path (8FP) the tools that we use for transforming ourselves for abandoning all cravings.

The short version of the process:

- 1) Truth number one: Notice when an emotion appears in your body as result of facing a pleasant or more often an unpleasant situation. This is the sign that you are experiencing some *dukkha* (anything between dissatisfaction to suffering).
- 2) Truth number two: Ask yourself: What is my craving or aversion right now?
- 3) Investigate what your mind is telling you (Develop a Complete View about it - 8FP 1st component).
- 4) Decide to let go of this craving or aversion right now (Skilful Intention - 8FP 2nd component).
- 5) Experience the freedom from the craving or aversion (Truth number three). The emotion in the body and the unpleasant feelings disappear straight away.

The longer version is presented in the following annexes.

The five precepts for lay people mentioned in *Annex 1* are:

- protecting all living beings
- taking only what is given
- skilful speech
- no sexual misconduct
- no mind altering substances

Annex 1: Summary of how to use the *dhamma* for abandoning craving

1) Follow the five precepts for the rest of your life. Study the practical aspects of the *dhamma* having the approach proposed by the Buddha in the *Kalama sutta* (AN 3.65) - "this *dhamma*, when adopted & carried out, leads to welfare & to happiness" — then you should enter & remain in them".

2) Dry up the remains of the past

A three phases set of processes that will allow you to abandon your fears and aversions and associated cravings.

Phase 1 - discover what needs to be transformed /abandoned;

Phase 2 - make peace with the past;

Phase 3 - abandon unskillful habits/reactions.

Phase 1 - discover what needs to be transformed/abandoned

Phase 1.1 - review past and present unpleasant events, persons involved, associated emotions in the body -feelings and wounds which are reopened by these events, using Annex 2 list of 300 feelings, doing a separate list for each event;

Phase 1.2 - what is your subset of the 128 fears & aversions? Use Annex 3 - colour code each item depending on their intensity and frequency for you;

Phase 1.3 - make the list of people you need to be at peace with (including deceased people and yourself).

Phase 2 - make peace with the past using a 3 step process

2a - making peace with past events and people (using the 1st component of the 8FP - view)

2a1 - peace with one person & unpleasant events associated with him/her

For each of the following sub-steps write down by hand on paper with great detail:

2a1.1 - your sufferings in this relationship;

2a1.2 - the positive aspects;

2a1.3 - the other person's sufferings;

2a1.4 - your negative contributions to the relationship.

Let go of all negativities in the relationship and do a purification by burning all you have written down in steps 2a1.1 and 2a1.4.

Repeat 2a1 for all people of the list exhibited in P1.3

After being at peace with everyone then make peace with yourself:

2a2 - peace with yourself:

For each of the following sub-steps write down by hand on paper with great detail:

2a2.1 - the things you don't like about yourself, past & present thinking, talking, action;

2a2.2 - the things you like about yourself, past & present thinking, talking, action;

2a2.3 - the sufferings you caused to yourself (not the ones seeing in 2a1.1).

Let go of all negativities in the relationship with yourself and do a purification by burning all you have written down in steps 2a2.1 and 2a2.3.

2b - set up skilful intentions (using the 2nd component of the 8FP - intention)

List of some positive intentions; Willingness to:

- Nurture your body (healthy food in moderation, good sleep, exercise, etc.)
- Not give any energy to negative thoughts or traits;

- Let go one by one of my fears and my aversions;
- Be attuned/compassionate to the suffering of myself and of others;
- Be gentle to myself;
- Be gentle to others;
- Send thoughts of loving-kindness to myself;
- Send thoughts of loving-kindness to others;
- Being self-supporting;
- Being grateful;
- Notice when joy is present, cultivate joy;
- Notice when peace of mind is present, cultivate peace of mind;
- Notice when the mind is silent, cultivate the silence of the mind;
- Meditate few minutes after waking up, noticing the emotional mind state;
- Meditate few minutes before going to bed, reviewing the day, making notes of what we did well and what we could improve upon;

List of some intentions of avoiding coping behaviours include:

- No attempt to control situations and others;
- No ill-will (criticising, blaming) towards myself and others;
- Not trying to impress or please others and get attention;
- Not manipulating (seducing) or exploiting;
- No procrastinating, complaining, sabotaging;
- Not isolating, disconnecting, withdrawing;
- Not compulsively seeking distractions (TV, sex, gambling, physical activity);
- Not seeking excitement with drugs, alcohol, food;
- Not going into fantasy, dissociation, denial;

2c - apply these intentions in every moment of my life by developing the 8FP components 3 to 6: speech, action, livelihood, effort.

Phase 3-abandon unskillful habits (using the 7th component of the 8FP - *sati*-attention)

Intend to have no reaction to unpleasant situations. Aiming at just being fully present. Notice everything happening in self (particularly the emotion; where is it in the body?) and outside us. Not taking events personally we will be able progressively not to have any reaction (fully accepting the event as it is). Not reacting will give us the possibility to notice what's going on in the others involved in the event (noticing and opening our heart to the sufferings experienced by the other person(s)).

3) Abandon the few cravings left

Use the strategy of temporarily protecting your six sense bases for the cravings you notice you still have even after having abandoned all your fears and aversions. Some of the cravings left may include: music, beautiful forms, food, etc. You may come back to enjoy all five sense pleasures once you notice the craving is gone as result of dispassion.

4) Abandon the latent tendencies by dwelling in the four *jhānas*

At some stage of the above process Stream-Entry should be achieved and all cravings associated with the senses will progressively be abandoned. When the five hindrances have been completely abandoned, *jhāna* will be entered without having to do anything. After some dwelling in *jhānas* one to four the latent tendencies will be abandoned and *arahantship/nibbāna* will one day be realised.

Note: This process is developed in a seven-week course called “Transforming Emotions” that I have taught over to some 400 people over the past four years. This course as well as the three-week course entitled “Practical dhamma” where I present the *dhamma* in a very practical fashion, are available, notes and recordings, for download. Please send me a message on the blog if you are interested.

Annex 2: Some 300 Feelings (& the 5 Wounds) we often feel without realising it

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Abandoned | Childlike | Eager | Healthy | Longing | Radiant | Stupefied |
| Able | Clean | Ecstatic | Heartache | Loose | Rage | Suffering |
| Accepted | Clear | Elated | Heavenly | Loving | Rapture | Suppressed |
| Adamant | Combative | Electrified | Helpful | Low | Real | Surprised |
| Adequate | Comfortable | Empathetic | Helpless | Lustful | Refreshed | Sympathetic |
| Admire | Compassiona | Empty | High | | Rejected | |
| Affectionate | Competent | Enchanted | Homesick | Mad | Relaxed | Talkative |
| Afraid | Competitive | Energetic | Honoured | Mean | Relieved | Teary |
| Agony | Condemned | Enervated | Hopeful | Melancholy | Remorse | Tempted |
| Agreeable | Confident | Envious | Hopeless | Miserable | Respected | Tenacious |
| Alert | Confused | Embarrassed | Horrible | Mistreated | Responsible | Tender |
| Alone | Conspicuous | Entranced | Humorous | Mystical | Reverent | Tenuous |
| Ambivalent | Contempt | Erotic | Humiliated | | Romantic | Tense |
| Amused | Contented | Excited | Humble | Naughty | | Tentative |
| Angry | Contrite | Exposed | Hurt | Neglected | Sad | Terrible |
| Animated | Controlled | Exasperated | Hysterical | Nervous | Sated | Terrified |
| Annoyed | Cosy | Exhausted | Horrorified | Nostalgic | Satisfied | Threatened |
| Anxious | Courageous | Exhilarated | | | Scared | Thrilled |
| Apathetic | Craving | Explosive | Ignored | Obnoxious | Secure | Tired |
| Appreciated | Cruel | Expressive | Immortal | Obsessed | Selfish | Triumph |
| Astounded | Crushed | Evil | Impatient | Odd | Sensual | Turned on |
| Awed | Cynical | | Imposed upon | Open | Serene | |
| Awkward | | Fascinated | Impressed | Optimistic | Servile | Union |
| | Daring | Fearful | Inadequate | Outraged | Settled | Upset |
| Beautiful | Deceitful | Flighty | Infatuated | Overjoyed | Sexy | Uptight |
| Betrayed | Decisive | Flustered | Infuriated | Overwhelm | Shaky | Used |
| Bitter | Defeated | Foolish | Inspired | | Shut down | Useful |
| Blissful | Defensive | Forgotten | Insignificant | Pain | Silent | |
| Blue | Delighted | Frantic | Integrated | Panicked | Shocked | Vital |
| Bold | Desire | Frustrated | Interested | Passionate | Silly | Vile |
| Bored | Desirable | Frightened | Intimidated | Patient | Sceptical | Vindictive |
| Brave | Despair | Free | Invigorated | Peaceful | Sleepy | Victimised |
| Bright | Destructive | Fulfilled | Isolated | Pessimistic | Sneaky | Vulnerable |
| Brilliant | Determined | Full | | Perplexed | Solemn | |
| Bubbly | Different | Fun | Jealousy | Persecuted | Sorrowful | Weak |
| Burdened | Diffident | Fury | Joyful | Petrified | Sorry | Wishy-Washy |
| | Diminished | | Jubilant | Pity | Spirited | Whole |
| Calm | Disagreeable | Generous | Jumpy | Playful | Spiritual | Worried |
| Capable | Disappointed | Giving | | Pleasant | Spiteful | |
| Carefree | Discontented | Grateful | Kind | Pleased | Spontaneous | Yearning |
| Caring | Disgusted | Greedy | | Powerful | Spunky | |
| Centred | Disorganised | Grief | Lazy | Pressured | Stable | The 5 wounds |
| Challenged | Distracted | Grounded | Lecherous | Prissy | Startled | Rejection |
| Charmed | Distraught | Grumpy | Left out | Protective | Stingy | Abandonment |
| Cheated | Disturbed | Guilty | Light | Proud | Strange | Humiliation |
| Cheerful | Dominated | | Light-hearted | | Strong | Betrayal |
| Cherished | Dubious | Happy | Lively | Quarrelsome | Stupid | Injustice |
| Childish | Dumb | Hate | Lonely | Quiet | Stunned | |

Use this table for every past and present event in your life that causes you to experience some dukkha. Write the name of the person(s) associated with the event whom you may hold responsible for the unpleasant/traumatic situation. Write the location in the body where you feel an emotion. Write also your reaction to this event (e.g. fear, aversion).

Annex 3: List of 128 Fears and Aversions

(colour each cell as per the intensity of it: green=no-issue, yellow=small, orange=big, red=huge)

| | | | | |
|---------------------|---|--|----------------------|------------------|
| Abandon | Depression | Fear of others | I'm stupid | Pride |
| Accusing | Discontent | Fear of rejection | Ill-tempered | Procrastination |
| Agitation | Disgust | Fear of sickness (physical or mental) | Ill-will | Projections |
| Anger | Dissatisfaction | Fear of some animals (spiders, snakes, etc.) | Impatience | Rage |
| anguish | Enemies | Fear of storm and other natural phenomena | Insecure | Rebellion |
| Annoyed | Expectations | Fear of success | Irony | Recklessness |
| anxiety | Fault-finding | Fear of the unknown | Irritation | Reject |
| Anxious | Fear of ageing | Fear of unkindness | It's not good for me | Reject authority |
| Apprehensive | Fear of authorities (government, police, justice, etc.) | Fear that X will not let me do what I wish | Jealousy | Reproaching |
| Argue | Fear of being controlled | Fear to be alone | Judgmental | Repulsion |
| Attachment to views | Fear of being enclosed in a small space or room and unable to escape (claustrophobia) | Fear to be happy | Kill-joy | Resentment |
| Aversion | Fear of being misunderstood | | Laziness | Resigned |
| Bad temper | Fear of blood | Fear to be rejected/abandoned | Low self esteem | Resistance |
| Being bossy | Fear of boredom | Fear to be successful | Misrepresentation | Restlessness |
| Being in a hurry | Fear of death | Fear to die before having completed | Morose | Sabotaging |
| Being reactive | Fear of driving | Fear to lose control | Negativity | Sadness |
| Boredom | Fear of failure | Fear to speak in public | No confidence | Sarcasm |
| Commenting | Fear of hight (vertigo) | Fear to take a plane, a boat, etc. | Not accepting | Shame |
| Comparing | Fear of illness | Force situations | Not committed | Stonewalling |
| Complaining | Fear of loosing xy | Frustration | Not motivated | terror |
| Conceit | Fear Of Missing Out | Grumble | Not wanting | Threatening |
| Contempt | Fear of my (ex) husband/wife/partner | Guilt | Obsession | Too hard |
| Controlling | Fear of not being able to love | Hatred | panic | Torpor/Lethargy |
| Cringing | Fear of not being capable | I can't do it | phobia | Wasting time |
| Criticism | Fear of not being loved / loveable | I don't deserve | Poor me | Wrong view |
| Deception | Fear of not saying or doing what I should | I'm not good enough | Powerless | |

Annex 4: An example of how to use of the dhamma to abandon a fear: the fear of death

Step 1) Discover your death-*dukkha* (Truth number one) using the 300 feelings and 5 wounds sheet (Annex 2).

Record, when thinking about death (of you or a loved one):

- a) where in the body you have an emotion
- b) all the feelings and possible wounds that may re-open (tick the boxes)
- c) your reaction: i.e fear of death and/or an aversion for it

Step 2) Discover the aspects of your life you have a attachment to and are afraid to loose at death, by

a) writing a list of all things that define you: e.g. gender, ethnicity, background, body features (height, weight, slim/fat, hair colour, eyes colour, etc...), family situation, friends, education, health, work, hobbies, qualities, defects, possessions, etc.

b) highlight in green the items that are dear to you

c) highlight in red the items you have an aversion to

Step 3) Develop the 1st six components of the Eight-fold-path (Truth number 4)

a) Component number 1. Develop a Complete View around death by writing in great details about three aspects:

a1) the *dukkha* (from dissatisfaction to pain, to suffering) that death causes you

a2) what aspects of death you can accept (e.g. inevitability, necessity, etc.)

a3) what are your negative contribution to this topic (“the 2nd arrow”) that makes the unpleasantness worse

b) Component number 2. Write a list of Skilful Intentions you are going to put in place and reinforce regularly:

b1) Commit to abandon the fear or aversion to death

b2) Commit to abandon the attachment to the aspects of yourself that are dear to you (the green items)

b3) Commit to abandon the aversions to the aspects of yourself that you have issue with (the red items)

b4) Commit to focusing on using your time left (for which you have no idea how much you have) to develop a sense of urgency and accomplish the tasks of the dhamma (Truth number 2):

b4a) Becoming a stream-enterer i.e. abandoning the 1st three fetters (belief in a permanent self, attachment to rites and rituals, doubt (about the dhamma and about your abilities to fulfil the tasks)

b4b) Abandon the other two fetters, the five hindrances, the latent tendencies and realise *nibbāna* (Truth number 3)

c) Develop the following four components from the point of view of death:

c1) Component number 3. positive speech (internal & external) about death

c2) Component number 4. action: protect and sustain life (yours and others)

c3) Component number 5. livelihood: abandon the aspects of your life that are not conducive to your intentions about achieving the tasks of the dhamma

c4) Component number 6. effort: protect your mind against negative thinking. Cultivate positive thinking.

Annex 5: Awareness of the body in meditation

using a 12-steps breathing exercise (Based on Thanissaro Bhikkhu book “Each and every breath”)

Aim: Using the breath to become aware of the state of the whole body and to tranquilise the body when required.

This method is very useful at the beginning of each meditation allowing one to be fully aware of one’s body state and to become grounded. It is also to be used anytime during the meditation when tension or tightness is felt.

The method is to move our awareness from one body area to another body area while breathing into them.

For the first six body areas one breathes in and out into the specific area.

- Start with the area few centimetres below the navel;
- Next with the area few centimetres above the navel;
- Next with the area of the solar plexus (the spot right in front of our stomach);
- Next with the area at the level of the heart;
- Next with the area on top of the lungs;
- Next with the area of the throat;

For the following six areas breathe in and out moving your awareness along the specific body area:

- Move awareness (breathe in) from the top of the throat, via the face, to the top of the head (breathe out) to the back of the head, to the back of the neck;
- Move awareness (breathe in) from the top of the right shoulder, down the upper arm, the right elbow, (breathe out) then the forearm, the hand, down to the tip of each finger (clear awareness of the tip of all five fingers);
- Move awareness (breathe in) from the top of the left shoulder, down the upper arm, the left elbow, (breathe out) then the forearm, the hand, down to the tip of each finger (clear awareness of the tip of all five fingers);
- Move awareness (breathe in) from the tailbone, up to the back of the neck and (breathe out) down back to the tailbone;
- Move awareness (breathe in) from the top of the right leg, down the upper leg, the right knee, (breathe out) then the lower leg, the foot, down to the tip of each toe (clear awareness of the tip of all five toes);
- Move awareness (breathe in) from the top of the left leg, down the upper leg, the left knee, (breathe out) then the lower leg, the foot, down to the tip of each toe (clear awareness of the tip of all five toes).

Add the parts of the body you may consider useful depending on your morphology and personal history (e.g. old pain).

You may want to repeat this exercise for the 12 areas or just one specific area where you may have felt some tension or tightness.

This method is great for becoming aware and correcting our posture (e.g. back gently erect or not). You may then move to your meditation (although this exercise is meditative as we are cultivating *sati* (attention, curiosity)).

If during the meditation you notice any tension or tightness in a part of the body, come back to the exercise staying on the part(s) associated with the pain, consciously trying to relax the spot (but without any desires of result; just apply and be attentive). Have a sense that the breath energy is coming in and out freely and easily through the body part(s). There’s nothing obstructing it. When that part of the body feels refreshed, move your attention to different parts or come back to your meditation.

Annex 6: Glossary of *Pali* terms

| <i>Pali</i> term | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| * | These are the various terms the Buddha was using to list what needs to be abandoned in order to realise <i>nibbāna</i> . These terms overlap. |
| Abhidhamma | A theory of the <i>dhamma</i> written centuries after the Buddha. Many concepts there are not in line with the original <i>suttas</i> . |
| akusala-mūla | Unwholesome roots. * |
| AN - Anguttara Nikāya | Numerical Discourses. A collection of some 8100 <i>suttas</i> organised by number of topics. |
| ānāpānasati | Attention to breathing in & out. |
| anupādisesa | Having no substratum of life remaining. The five <i>khandhas</i> are completely extinguished. |
| anusayā | The latent tendencies. * Sensual desire, aversion, views (in particular personality view), doubt, conceit, craving for existence/desire for becoming, ignorance. |
| arahant | A “worthy” person. A person who has realised <i>nibbāna</i> as result of the abandonment of all cravings. |
| arūpas | Without form or body, incorporeal. |
| āsavas | Taints. * Mental defilements of sensual pleasures, craving for existence, and ignorance. |
| bhāvanā | Mental development. |
| Bhikkhu | Buddhist monk |
| Bhikkhuni | Buddhist nun |
| Brahmavihārās | Abodes in Brahma (the Hindu tradition refers to Brahma as "The Creator" within the Trimurti, the triple deity or supreme divinity that includes Vishnu and Shiva). Four qualities to be developed that were already defined before the Buddha in the Hindu tradition. The 1st one, <i>metta</i> , is the only one presented in details in two <i>suttas</i> . |
| Buddha | Awakened |
| dhamma | A term with many meanings depending on context. In this document it is used for “the teachings” of the Buddha. |
| DN - Dhiga Nikāya | Long Discourses. A collection of 34 very long <i>suttas</i> . |
| dukkha | <i>dukkha</i> is the result of our misguided attitude (cravings/aversions) to life situations. The result of <i>dukkha</i> includes: suffering, pain, discontentment, uneasiness, unhappiness, affliction, anxiety, dissatisfaction, discomfort, anguish, stress, misery, frustration, disharmony, friction, expectations, displeasure from being unable to satisfy our desires and wishes. <i>dukkha</i> is optional. <i>dukkha</i> is not inherent to the phenomena of the world, only in the way in which the non-awakened mind experiences the world. |
| ganthā | The ties. * |
| jhāna | The four <i>jhānas</i> are the last component of the Eight-fold-path. In <i>jhānas</i> 1 and 2 a practitioner experiences joy and body pleasure, in <i>jhāna</i> 3 pleasure and equanimity, in <i>jhāna</i> 4 perfection of <i>sati</i> (attention) and equanimity. |
| khandhas | Heaps, aggregates, collections, groupings. The five material and mental factors that take part in the rise of craving and clinging in a sentient being: form, sensations (or feelings), perceptions, mental activity, and consciousness. |
| kilesā | Corruptions. * |

| Pali term | Description |
|----------------------|---|
| Mahāyāna | A Buddhist tradition that started in India some 400 years after the Buddha. This tradition does not present the early <i>suttas</i> . It has developed its own set of scriptures and concepts. This tradition is found in China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan (Zen). |
| manomaya | Mind made body |
| Mara | A demon who represents various unhelpful qualities, everything from death to personal obstructions, such as greed or ignorance. |
| metta | Loving-kindness. Practice of opening one's heart and send good-wishes thoughts to self and others. |
| MN - Majjhima Nikāya | Middle Length Discourses. A collection of 152 long <i>suttas</i> . |
| nibbāna | A verb: to extinguish. An <i>arahant</i> has extinguished of all forms of cravings. |
| nimitta | Sign, mark, characteristic, attribute, feature. A quality we put on something that causes us to experience some craving. |
| nirodha | Cessation of perception and feelings. A deep concentration practice where the body sensations and most of the mind abilities are gone. Not a useful practice for realising <i>nibbāna</i> . |
| nīvaraṇā | The five hindrances. * |
| oghā | The floods. * |
| Pali | Language of the texts. <i>Pali</i> is the literary language of the early Buddhists closed to the language spoken by the Buddha. |
| paññā | Wisdom, insight. |
| pīti | Joy. A mental factor. |
| rūpa | Form, figure, appearance |
| samatha | Tranquility of body and mind. |
| samādhi | The last component of the Eight-fold-path, the four <i>jhānas</i> . |
| samāpattis | To be in a state of. Concentrative meditation practices originated in the yoga Hindi tradition that was rejected by the future Buddha as not useful for realising <i>nibbāna</i> . |
| samma ditthi | Complete view. The 1st component of the Eight-fold-path that needs to be developed in order to dispel bit by bit all aspects of delusion. |
| saṃyojanā | The five fetters. * |
| sangha | Association, assembly, company or community. In Buddhism, <i>sangha</i> refers to the monastic community of <i>bhikkhus</i> (monks) and <i>bhikkhunis</i> (nuns). Those who have attained any of the two stages of awakening are referred to as the <i>ariya-sangha</i> "noble <i>sangha</i> ". |
| Sāriputta | One of the chief disciple of the Buddha. |
| sati | To remember, to pay attention. The component number seven of the Eight-fold-path. It becomes easier to pay attention when the mind is progressively abandoning cravings/fears/aversions. |
| satipaṭṭhāna | The four <i>satipaṭṭhāna</i> are a set of practices to develop attention. |
| sila | Nature, character, habit, behaviour. Then moral practice, ethics. The perfection of <i>sila</i> at the beginning of the Gradual Path includes: following the precepts and transforming ourselves to completely abandon our cravings, fears/aversions and delusions. |
| SN - Samyutta Nikāya | Connected Discourses. A collection of some 2900 <i>suttas</i> organised by topics. |

| Pali term | Description |
|--------------------|---|
| Snp - Sutta Nipāta | One of the oldest collection of <i>suttas</i> . It contains 74 <i>suttas</i> . |
| sukha | Pleasure experienced in the body. <i>sukha</i> is either spiritual (i.e. in <i>jhāna</i>) or as result of a contact with one of the senses (e.g. .tasty food). |
| sutta | Discourse, dialog. |
| taṇhā | Craving. * |
| Theravada | The only early Buddhist sect still operating today in countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. <i>Theravadin</i> monasteries are also found today in UK, USA, Australia. |
| upādānā | Attachments. * |
| upekkhā | Equanimity. |
| vinaya | Code of conduct for the monastics. |
| vipassanā | The quality of Insight. In the <i>suttas vipassanā</i> is always associated with <i>samatha</i> (tranquility). When the body and the mind are tranquil the mind becomes silent. True insight pops-up in a peaceful mind. The <i>vipassanā</i> movement that started in Burma at the end of the XIX century has totally redefined this term which is now a practice instead of a quality. |
| Visuddhimagga | The Path of Purification. The 'great treatise' on Buddhist practice written by <i>Buddhaghosa</i> (an Indian monk) in the 5th Century in Sri Lanka. Several aspects of the <i>Visuddhimagga</i> are not in accordance with what is found in the original <i>suttas</i> . |
| vitakka-vicāra | Thinking and pondering. In <i>jhāna</i> 1 these mental activities are free from the five hindrances so are conducive to true insight. |
| yogā | The bonds. * |

Annex 7: Feelings still experienced by an arahant

The main feelings experienced by an arahant are : equanimity, pleasure and joy (especially the pleasures and joy of having finished what needed to be done). Meanwhile they may experience some 136 out of the 300 listed in Annex 2. Only six are on the unpleasant side of things: embarrassment, deception, sorry, tired, unpleasantness and pain (physical not mental).

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Affectionate | Caring | Different | Grounded | Lively | Quiet | Spontaneous |
| Able | Centred | | | Loving | | Spunky (plein de cran) |
| Accepted | Cheerful | Eager (désireux) | Happy | | Radiant | Stable |
| Adamant (catégorique) | Cherished | Ecstatic (en extase) | Healthy | Metta | Rapture | Strong |
| Admiring | Childlike | Elated (exulté) | Heavenly (merveilleux) | Mystical ? | Real | Surprised |
| Agreeable | Clean | Embarrassment | Helpful | | Refreshed | Sympathetic |
| Alert | Clear | Empathetic | Honoured | Naughty (coquin) | Relaxed | |
| Animated | Comfortable | Energetic | Hopeful | | Relieved | Tenacious |
| Appreciated | Compassionate | Enthusiast | Humorous | Open | Respected | Tender |
| Appreciative | Competent | Entranced (ravi) | Humble | Optimistic | Responsible | Tentative |
| Astounded (étonné) | Confident | Equanimous | Impressed | Overjoyed | Reverent | Thrilled (ravi) |
| Awed (impressionné) | Conspicuous (visible) | Exhilarated (vivifié) | | | Romantic ? | Tired (fatigué) |
| | Contented | Expressive | Inspired | Pain | | Triumph |
| Blissful (en béatitude) | Cosy (à l'aise) | | Integrated | Patient | Sated (repu) | |
| Bold (audacieux) | Courageous | Fascinated | Interested | Peaceful | Satisfied | Union |
| Brave | | Free | Invigorated (revigoré) | Playful | Secure | Unpleasantness |
| Bright | Daring (audacieux) | Fulfilled | | Pleasant | Serene | Useful |
| Brilliant | Deception | Full | Joyful | Pleased | Settled | |
| Bubbly (pétillant) | Decisive | Fun | Jubilant (radieux) | Pleasure (physical) sukha | Silent | Vital |
| | Delighted | | | | Solemn | |
| Calm | Desire | Generous | Kind | Powerful | Sorry (désolé) | Whole |
| Capable | Desirable | Giving | | Proud (lion's roar) | Spirited (dynamique) | |
| Carefree (insouciant) | Determined | Grateful | Light | | Spiritual | |

