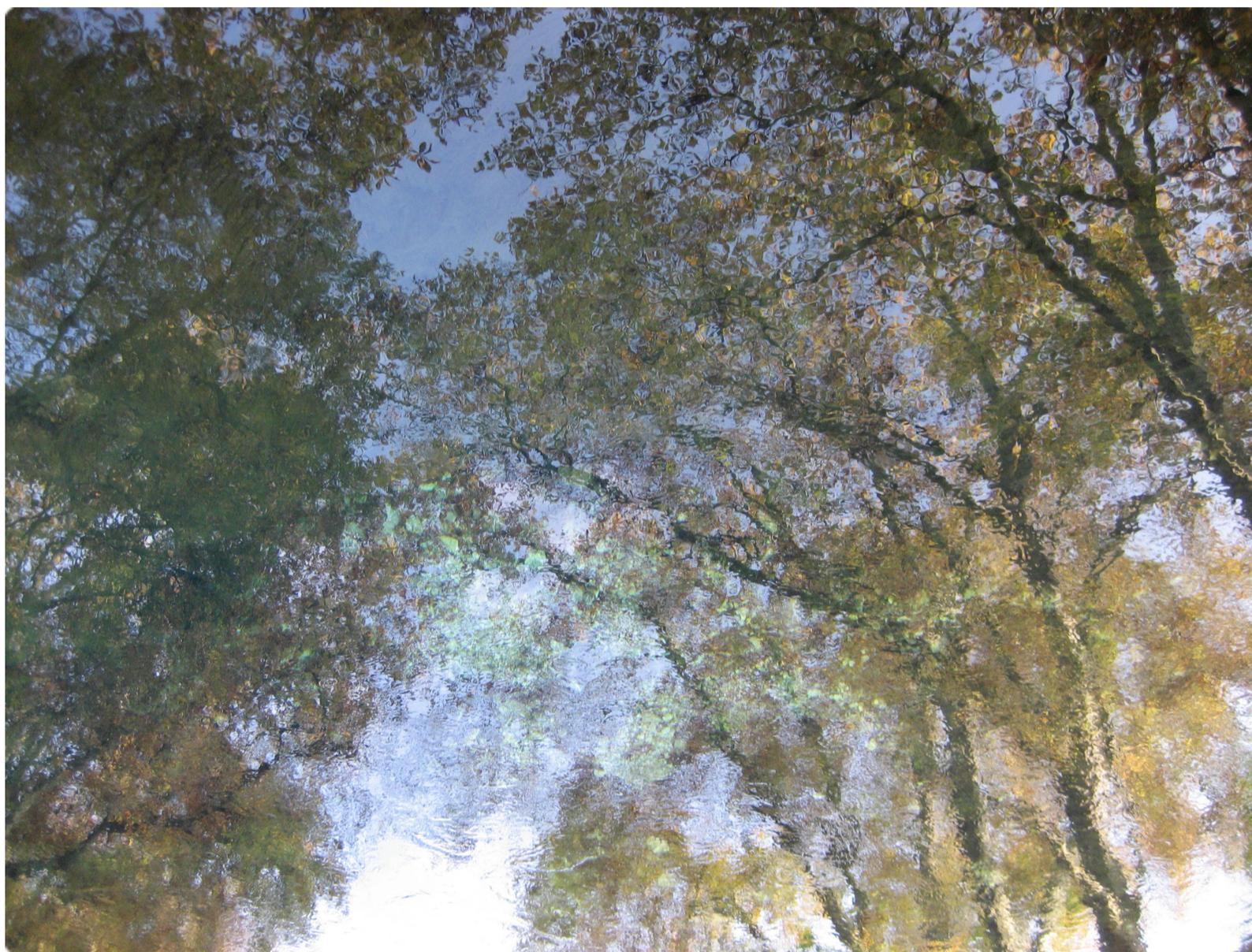


# Questions & Answers

ALBA Day of Practice 20 February 2021



## *'A handful of leaves'*



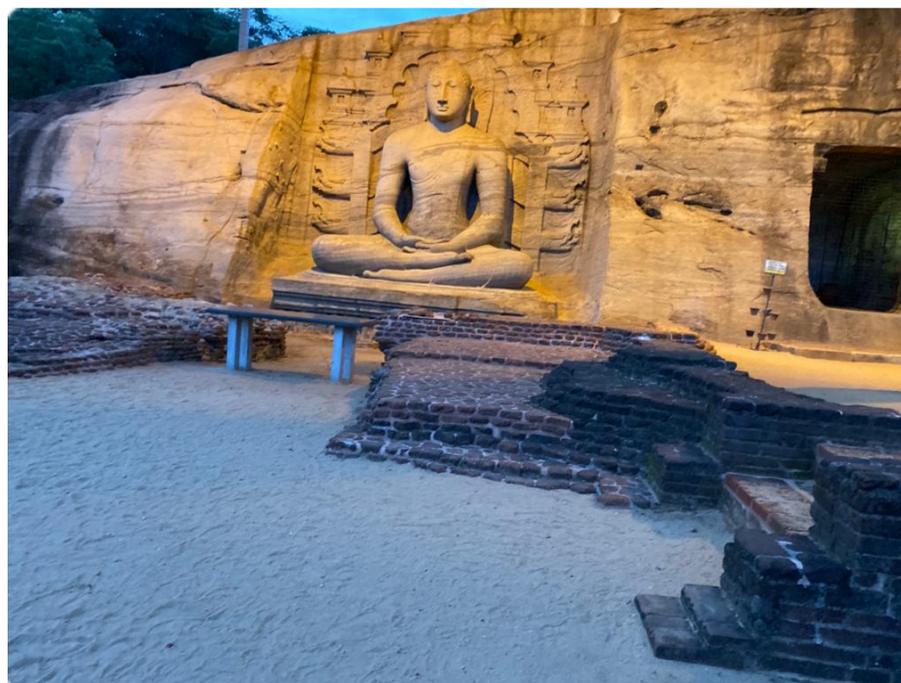
Martin Evans

# Meditation

*Q - The experience of non-interference, as you so wonderfully phrased it, is something that does not come easy to the mind, due to our conditioning. Could you talk a little more on this theme and maybe give some more practical guidance. It somehow seems like the doing of non-doing.*

A - Thank you for your encouragement to talk more about non-interference - I saw your question in time to talk about it at the end of the morning session. To elaborate further, not engaging with and not interfering with phenomena is the way to see it as it is. Otherwise we add more complication to it. By complication I mean kamma. By not adding more investment in it (kamma) we allow the knots to unravel (which leads to the end of kamma). By interfering, we add more layers of delusion to delusion - we complicate it further. Not interfering means we allow it to reveal it's truth to us - which is the truth of anicca, dukkha, anatta. Not because we are imposing those ideas on what we experience because we think we know - but because these truths are in there waiting to be seen. Like rocks and stones that contain gold - we just keep washing away the impurities and the gold is revealed.

I am talking about practicing insight meditation. This doesn't mean we shouldn't do what is beneficial in daily life - that we shouldn't ever interfere in the world - because there are times when we need to - but we aspire to interfere with right action. We have to put right the wrong in our own hearts first before we point out the wrong in others. Then we are not interfering ('putting things right') because we can't bear things the way they are - but because it is beneficial and wise - and the right time to act.



## “Choice-less awareness”

*Q - You stress being in the present in our meditation but you don't suggest a meditation object. Are you implicitly suggesting we meditate in what I believe is called: “choiceless awareness”.*

A - That is true. Choiceless awareness means sustaining awareness with whatever object presents itself. Although I usually begin my meditation practice by coming into the body, I am not choosing a meditation object but open to the experience - whether the posture, or sensations, or the breath presents itself as an object. Then I may well 'drill down' into that object with sustained awareness - which you could describe as settling the mind in that object. But I'm not putting any special importance on the object, simply developing awareness. When awareness is well established I will 'set the mind free' - and simply observe, and not interfere. I will be curious. I will watch to see if the mind moves towards and away from the objects which arise and if I notice that a thought has been caught on the barb of preferences - I investigate that to see what it has to teach me.

## How long to meditate?

*Q - Is there an ideal duration for sitting or walking meditation?*

A - How long have you got? For me, I try to get up early enough to have enough time to feel like I've sat long enough, and then sit that bit longer. Insight often arises in that time when we feel like finishing our meditation, but stay just sitting that bit longer. But we should guard against the idea that meditation is separate from daily life. As long as we are awake, and in any posture, we can be mindful. And it is really helpful to 'steal' moments out of your day just to notice - to be present. If only for the time of one inhalation.



## Daily ritual

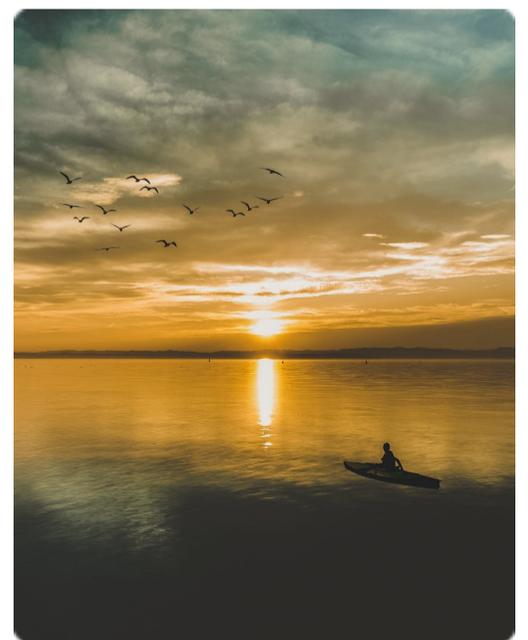
*Q - Is there a recognised daily ritual for mornings and evenings for lay people who follow this tradition?*

A - If you look in the Amaravati chanting book you will find a morning and evening chanting, which can form part of your daily practice - but it is not meant to be a ritual. We are not encouraged to follow anything in a ritualistic way - but rather use it for meditation and reflection.

## What should we do?

*Q - Martin spoke skilfully on what the Buddha explained regarding what we shouldn't do (grasp, cling, attach, have a concrete idea of self) but would he share some thoughts on what we should do? (e.g. right action, livelihood, etc to reduce suffering in the world)*

A - You will have noticed when I talked about the Eightfold Path in the afternoon, that I said it is mainly about avoiding what is wrong. If we can avoid wrong action, wrong livelihood etc we will necessarily be reducing the suffering in the world - as we won't be adding to it through wrong action. And we will have established a sound basis from which to act with kindness, compassion and wisdom. I know many Buddhists who do so much to reduce the suffering in the world, but they don't make a burden out of 'trying to do good', it is just a natural expression of the way they are - the result of their practice.



## Not overcomplicating things - keeping it simple

*Q - I love your message of not overcomplicating things. But the Dhamma is so vast - thousands of suttas, commentaries, Buddhist books, and more. How do we find a system of practice that is complete without worrying that there's something we've missed or left out? How do we recognize when we have enough information to form a complete practice?*

A - We tend to overload with information, and assimilate very little of it into practice. Our challenge is to turn information into wisdom. The accumulation of too much information can just add to our confusion. We can read enough information about Dukkha on one page, but it can take a lifetime to admit we experience it.

## How to keep it simple?

*Q - You have been speaking about the simplicity of the Buddha's teachings, and yet there are so very many books available about Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings, which encourage a lot of mental activity and thoughts. Why is this, and what is a good way to approach these writings? And could you say a bit about the difference between thinking and reflecting?*

A - I would recommend taking one theme at a time. Decide what is a reliable source of information and take a look at it. Investigate it and reflect on it. That means stepping back from it and let it percolate through the system. Don't rush to try to make sense of it. Keep going back again and again - with an attitude of curiosity. But taking one theme at a time doesn't mean not seeing it in a context. We can look at right speech but always place it in a context - it is part, not the whole, of what the Buddha taught about Sila (virtue or right living). Don't get obsessive - seeing it in a context is part of stepping back. Look at the first noble truth, but you won't understand it if you don't see it in the context of the second. You won't benefit much from looking at one of the factors of the Eightfold Path, if you lose sight of the bigger picture - without seeing it in the context of them all.



## Is it okay to keep it simple?

*Q - It is good that all we need is simplicity. Why are there so many lists of numbers which are difficult to remember e.g. Eightfold Path, Eight Winds, Five Aggregates, Five Precepts, Four Noble Truths etc?*

A - The Dhamma is conveyed in lists because it is easier to remember that way. It helps if we know there are five precepts but we can only remember four. We take another look to see what we've left out. There might seem a lot of lists - but we can take our time. If something doesn't seem to fit just now lay it aside. Everything will fall into place like pieces of a jigsaw, when we understand.

## Kindness in seeing

*Q - Why is kindness needed in seeing the truth?*

A - Because otherwise we try to reason it out if we use the intellect. We can't see the truth unless we come from the heart.

In my experience, I would also say that I let go through practicing Metta (loving kindness). I found it easier to let go of the beautiful blissful state that comes out of that practice than to let go of something I didn't like. When we don't like something, we are very happy to 'let go' of it - because we want to get rid of it. We just follow our aversion - we push it away. But when we let go of something which is really beautiful - that is true relinquishment. Of course Piti or joy can arise from other objects of meditation. But that sense of wellbeing that comes out of cultivating the heart is very helpful and well worth nurturing - and it is a bonus that it is a good place to practice insight meditation from. Then we realise a deeper sense of wellbeing that comes from seeing things as they really are. It is a wellbeing that isn't dependent on conditions. That simplifies everything.

