

# Where is the end of the world?

What is the purpose of meditation? Where is it heading?

..... It is only to realise the end of the world, nothing more.

So what is this world which comes to an end?



*North Cornish Coastal Path between Boscastle and Bude*

.....It is the world we call Samsara.

Samsara is the conditioned - that which arises through causes. It is the world we've been born into. Birth doesn't happen by accident, it arises through causes. Samsara is all we've ever known and all we will ever know, unless we come to the end of the world.

## *We don't need to make sense of the world*

The Buddhist path is a path of understanding, of seeing clearly, yet we don't need to make sense of the world to bring it to an end. Trying to make sense of the world is an exercise of the intellect – we reason things out using our conditioning – it can only lead to forming views and opinions about the world. Then we think we know what is good and what is bad, better or worse, and we start to interfere with the world, which gives rise to more worldly conditions. We form a view of the world and try to impose it on others. Thinking we know best makes life very difficult for us and for everyone else. It traps us ever more securely in the world. The Buddha's path of understanding leads to freeing ourselves from the world, not making sense of it. We don't need to interfere with the world, we can just let it be. All we need to do is see it clearly.

We can't see it clearly by interfering with it, only by observing it exactly as it is.

## Finding the still centre



*Shop window display in the British Museum*

When we meditate, we are not trying to change the conditions we experience, we need to let them be. We train our minds to watch, but not touch. Just as you would train a child when going into a sweetshop. You would tell them it's OK to look but don't touch. At first, they won't understand. They can't see beyond 'why not?' So you explain that if they touch the sweets other people won't want to buy them. After a few tantrums they eventually learn!

When we can let things be, we can see them as they are and then something wonderful happens – something quite unexpected. The

mind begins to calm down. It's as though the mind gravitates naturally into the still centre at the 'eye of the storm'.

As we train our mind over and over to rest in that still centre, all the conditions that push and pull you away lose their power and gradually fade away. That is where the world ceases. The world of Samsara, which is all we've ever known, falls away, and we discover an understanding which isn't of this world but of the ending of this world. It is a realisation – something which is understood in the heart rather than with the intellect. It isn't reasoned out. In fact, we see that it can't be reasoned out. We can't put it into words. It can't be conceived of with the mind, yet we know it through direct experience.

### *The end of the world – Nirodha*

This is the ending of the world. Where is it found? It has no location, place and time don't apply. Yet, it can be experienced.

The Buddha taught a path which leads to the end of the world but he didn't claim the end of the world as his own or say that his way was the only way to reach it. The realisation of Nibbana is not Buddhist. It is just a Buddhist name for something which is beyond naming. It can't be put in a box and labelled – it is not a thing of this world. The Buddha only pointed the way. It is the path which he taught us, which is Buddhist, not the realisation.



I've heard it likened to the experience of falling through a black hole. We can't conceive what it's like on the other side. We can't conceive of a hole which is faster than the speed of light. A hole where things, once they enter, can never come back. In the same way, we can't conceive of the experience where the world comes to an end.



*From the top of the Shard in London*

Cessation (Nirodha) is the ending of conceptual thought.

The end of conceiving.

The end of birth itself.

Yet, just because we can't conceive of something, doesn't mean that it isn't possible. The Buddha discovered the end of the world. And he came back to show us the way so that we could discover it too.

## *When we let go nothing is lost*

The path takes us towards the end of the world so we can see how to fall into cessation but it is up to us whether we hold back and cling to the world or whether we let go. What happens is, we let go little by little until we are ready to let go completely.

For a long time, I thought enlightenment was a good idea but I wanted it on my own terms. I didn't want to let go of the world. I could make up a lot of reasons not to let go. Of course, our reasons to hold on to the world are all based on attachment and the delusion of self. The notion that the world depends on me and if I let go, it will come to an end and I will lose something that I want to keep forever.

Over time we realise by experience that when we let go, nothing is lost. Letting go may bring the world to an end but it doesn't destroy it. In fact, holding on destroys it. We squeeze the life out of it just like a child catching a butterfly, desperate to keep it. Of course, it ends in tears. We can reflect how we do the same in relationships. When we bring attachment to them, we squeeze the life out of them too. When we set people free that is the basis for a good relationship. Otherwise, it is all about me and mine. It is conditional love, not unconditional. Accepting people as they are, is the greatest gift, the greatest expression of love.

In meditation I've learnt that true peace is found in the eye of the storm, not by running away from it. By letting go over and over – which means by not interfering but just letting be – we naturally

gravitate towards the still centre where all things cease. It's not like we have to make it happen – we just let go of our resistance and our attachment to all things.

## *What are we letting go of?*

What are the '*things*' we're freeing ourselves from? The things of the world. The Buddha described them as the five aggregates which sum up the body-mind experience. When we grasp body, feeling, perception, mental conceptualisation and sense consciousness we grasp the world of things. In fact, I could use a capital **T** for things. We are obsessed with '*Thinging*'. We make Things out of all our experience. Instead of just experiencing mind and body, we turn them into *my* mind, *my* body and so we live in a world of separation – of me and other. We Thing the world into existence and cling to it without realising that we are turning it into a world of suffering. Because the moment it becomes ours we want it to be this way or that. Our world revolves around us and our preferences for the way it has to be so that we can be happy. This leads to suffering because we can't make ourselves happy. We are not content even if we get what we want. As soon as we get it, we find fault with it.

It is so easy to see that the end of suffering must be the end of the world. Yet, the path to the end of the world is not through self-destruction. There is no Thing to destroy because Things only exist through self-delusion by putting 'me' in the centre of the world which is like believing the earth is in the centre of the universe. We don't need to destroy the earth to remove it from

the centre of the universe – we just have let go of our wrong understanding.

The wrong understanding, that the sun goes round the earth comes from the false observation that it looks like it does and it certainly feels like it does. Similarly, it feels like we are the centre of the world. It feels that way – we are not denying this. But when we see clearly, we know that it is a delusion. Just because it feels like it, it doesn't make it true. Just because we can think something, it doesn't make it true either.

How could the world turn on its axis just because of me? The world revolves around natural laws such as the law of gravity and the law of causality. This is what the Buddha taught.

He showed us a path to the end of the world. What we find there is peace. It is not the peace we can conceive of because the conceptual mind will always conceive in terms of opposites - in terms of Things being and not being, existing and not existing. It is the peace in the centre of the storm of the conceptual world, where all Things cease.

So that is why there is nothing we need to do when we meditate. We need to learn the art of not interfering and not getting involved - just watching with detached observation and letting the mind gravitate naturally to that still centre where all Things cease.



## A path to freedom

We don't have much time. We need to find the end of the world before it finds us. When I look around, wherever I look, time is rushing by. We don't know when we will reach that precipice beyond which there is no coming back. The world will end whether we like it or not - so we'd better be ready!



We are encouraged to reflect that *'The days and nights are relentlessly passing, how well am I spending my time?'*(1) This isn't to turn the practice into a burden of things to do but rather to let go of. It is saying, how well am I disentangling my mind from grasping the world, from compulsively being born into the world over and over again.

This path to freedom brings an ending to all that – the ending of the world as we know it. When the Buddha was asked whether it was possible to reach the end of the world through walking He said no, but that His teaching did lead to the end of the world. In the Loka Sutta (2). He said He teaches the origination of the world and the ending of the world. It sounds like we are practicing to destroy the world but on the contrary, this is a path to freedom from greed, hate and delusion and this inevitably transforms the way we live in the world. By freeing ourselves we at least go some way towards saving the world.

*Martin Evans*

3 August 2022

## References

1. *'The ten subjects for frequent recollection by one who has gone forth'* Chanting book 1, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery
2. Loka Sutta (SN12.44) Thanissaro Bhikkhu Trans,  
[https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN12\\_44.html](https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN12_44.html)