

# Being completely human – secular buddhism, and beyond

*An eight-part course using recorded talks by Stephen Batchelor & Roshi Joan Halifax given at Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 25 through 29 March 2015*

## Discussion 3 of 8

### Part 5 (60:06) Stephen Batchelor: The Second Noble Task: Letting Go of Reactivity

1. Given that it is our nature as a human organism to react to internal and external conditions, how does Batchelor account for the characterisation of reactivity as being obstructive to our own liberation? Do you think that his explanation is a fair critique or not? Why so?
2. What parallel does Batchelor draw between this reactive nature and the three *nidanas* of contact, feeling and craving?
3. In the explanation for translating the Sanskrit *tanha* as reactivity instead of the common translation craving, Batchelor comments that the former is evocative of underlying and persistent dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) and that this reactivity manifests as an ‘unstoppable monologue of thought’. Would it then follow that this ‘unstoppable monologue’ at once arises from *dukkha* and is too, the source of *dukkha*? Why so or why not so?
4. In reference to the *Adittapariyaya Sutta: The Fire Sermon*, *tanha* is evoked by the visceral analogy of burning, the burning pain of the three fires of greed, hatred and delusion. Does this sutta describe your own sense of how reactivity is of the nature of *dukkha*? Give an example to illustrate how this ‘burning’ is or is not descriptive of your own sense of the discomfort of reactivity.
5. How is the metaphor of *tanha* as burning from the *Fire Sermon* an apt metaphor for present day, this *saeculum*?

6. How does the term aridity (Pali: *khila*) serve as a both a worldly and psychological descriptor of the consequences of our collective and individual reactivity?
7. How does the mythical figure of Mara as he appears throughout the suttas form a three dimensional image of the nature of the reactivity that seems to happen to us?  
Assuming Mara acts in some fashion, give an example of Mara's embodiment in your own life?
8. Mara, as embodying the *kleshas* of greed, hatred and delusion, can too be understood as 'not immaterial properties of something called "the mind" but they are the legacy of our evolution. They are embedded in our limbic system.' Assuming that you agree with this claim, what is the point Batchelor is making? If you disagree with his view, why?
9. The parable of the arrow illustrates at least two essential points. What two points do you pick up from your reading of it?
10. Reactivity is characterised: as being like a turning wheel, repetitive; as being like poison, intoxicating one's body/mind; as being like a crazy darkness, unsettling and vexing to the mind; as being like a fit of indulgence, a self-obsessed wallowing in attachment and greed. As *tahna* develops into clinging (Pali: *upadana*) it is likened to vanity, a narcissistic fixation on one's image. Provide another metaphor for, or characterisation of, reactivity that represents your own sense of it.
11. What reasoning does Batchelor offer to support his claim that the truth of craving as the origin of suffering is a metaphysical dogma, a truth that one either accepts or does not?
12. The alternative translations for the Pali *jahati* as abandon or let go are both problematic as each is a verb; each begs the question how? What does Batchelor advise here?

13. How is it that guilt is yet another form of reactivity? Give an example to illustrate your answer. Continue to develop your example, with an explanation of how that guilt in your example might be comprehended/embraced and subsequently let go of.
14. Paraphrase the comment that given an awareness of one's reactivity, the challenge of the four vows, is to 'exceed the inexhaustibility, by just a fraction'.
15. How does reflecting on the second task of letting go help us to understand and to accomplish the first task of embracing/comprehending *dukkha*?
16. To let go or to abandon is to immunise ourselves 'against these fears and desires and egotistic thoughts from somehow taking hold [because] there is no foothold, there's nowhere to land. [And so] to be free therefore, in this sense, has nothing to do with getting rid of something but rather cultivating a way of being in which we become somehow impervious to these thoughts and emotions that rise and so easily take us over.' In light of this comment, what is your sense of what it is to let go? Give an example.
17. In the closing discussion, Batchelor remarks that *dukkha pariñña*, which by definition is 'the ending of greed, the ending of hatred and the ending of delusion', is not to be understood as an extinction, rather a process marked by discernment. As one embraces reactivity the *kleshas* are known, i.e. one comprehends how they arise and how they cease. What practices are you familiar with that cultivate a non-reactivity that in turn, gives rise to an equanimous, tolerant, compassionate, open-heartedness?
18. Compare the objectives of the second great vow with that of the second task, noting any correspondences and/or their lack:
  - delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to transform them
  - arising is to be let go of