

# CONVERSATIONS WITH GODWIN

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## 1: TEACHING

**JYOTI:** *I thought in this first talk it would be useful to examine some areas to do with teaching meditation. There are a couple of points I could raise to start off. Most people when they start meditation, or on the spiritual life, have a great need for a teacher because the regions they are entering into are uncharted by themselves. They may have read books, but maps, being abstract, do not correspond to concrete reality. One of the things that a teacher is able to do is to respond to an individual in his concrete situation – in this sense it seems to me that a teacher is indispensable. But a good teacher will, I think, make himself dispensable as soon as possible, by showing you how your body, your feelings, your mind, and your relationships with other people and with the world, how all these things can be your teacher as well. This is one aspect.*

*Another is, I think a lot of people are not actually looking for a teacher, what they are looking for is an archetypal father or mother – someone who can tell them what it's all about, not help them enquire. The first role people play is when they internalise the mother or father figure, and I think the teacher can take the place of the superego in this way – and with some people this is what they are really looking for, not to learn, but for someone who knows.*

**GODWIN:** Let me make some comments about the second part of this. I think it is true that some people need figures of authority. Sometimes when they find such a teacher or guru it can take the form of being dependent on them, and they then take up a very easy position that what they have to do is merely to surrender to them, to accept them completely, so that they don't have to do anything on their own. It is an easy way out. There are some gurus who take up that position also. This is one type of relationship that is found in certain traditions. Some aspects of this are that in these traditions only a guru can initiate the student. Also he is supposed to have a secret teaching that can be transmitted to the student.

In the Theravada Buddhist tradition there is no place for such gurus. There is instead a beautiful word, which I like very much: *kalyana-mitta*, a spiritual friend. In this tradition the teacher is really a spiritual friend – it's a different relationship altogether. There are some spiritual teachers who are really learning while they are teaching, so then it comes to sharing, and helping each other – that's a beautiful relationship to have.

**JYOTI:** *I understand what you are saying, but I would like to press you a little further, because it seems to me that a teacher has to be able to answer whatever questions are raised, and therefore he must have some sort of conclusion about what the answer should be.*

**GODWIN:** I would suggest that a good teacher should not any conclusions. If he has a conclusion then he might try to impose that conclusion on others – and then he becomes a figure of authority. A teacher, as I see him, without taking up a particular position, can start exploring with the student: a problem is raised, then there is a sharing together with the emphasis on experience. When that happens the element of dependence is much less. I think a good teacher is someone who is helping another to help his or her self, he helps a student to discover whatever it is they need to discover about themselves. A teacher, in that sense, only provides a helpful atmosphere, perhaps offering some loose guidelines, and then leaves the student to make their own discoveries.

**JYOTI:** *It sometimes happens that a teacher gets raised to guru status in spite of his every effort – I'm thinking of Ramana Maharshi, for instance, who despite his early resistance, eventually had to let it happen, and they deified him. He retained his humility, but he couldn't prevent it happening.*

**GODWIN:** This is because there are people who need figures of authority, it is a psychological need, and is bound to arise in certain situations.

Another sort of teacher is one who is teaching without knowing that he is teaching. If there can be such teaching then the need for role-playing does not arise. Such teachers teach not so much by imparting information, as with their whole being, and that way they touch their students at a much deeper level.

Now let me say something about different types of teaching. For instance, in the Zen tradition, a teacher may very skillfully give rise to a crisis situation, where the familiar world, and the student's conclusions about it, just drop away, and at that moment insight can arise. It calls for really great skill for a teacher to use a crisis situation, or to create one.

Now another way, and one quite opposite to this, is where the teacher may play the role of a comedian, and one aspect of humour is being able to laugh at the absurdity of life, and another is not taking oneself too seriously.

**JYOTI:** *Humour is once again a disruption of the natural or expected course of events.*

**GODWIN:** Now I would also like to suggest that a teacher can come in many forms. If we are open, if – as it is said in the Zen tradition – we have a beginner's mind, we can learn from anyone, and from any experience. One can learn a great deal from children in this respect. Isn't it mentioned in one of the Gospels?

**JYOTI:** *Yes, it says: 'Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3). How would you interpret that saying?*

**GODWIN:** I think generally speaking a child does not have so much of an image to impose on the world, a child is very natural, just being his or her self.

**JYOTI:** *With a child you do not get, for instance a deferment of anger, a child just becomes angry, and then five minutes later it can be doing something totally different. But when you get older you get deferment and this can give rise to resentment.*

**GODWIN:** How is it that a child can get angry like this and a few minutes later be totally recovered, how is that possible?

**JYOTI:** *One reason is that a child is instantaneously using his energy there, whereas an adult is repressing that energy, an adult has a model: I shouldn't be angry, but a child has no such idea.*

**GODWIN:** Yes, because a child does not have this idea about not getting angry, the anger just arises and then it goes away.

I would say that an enlightened person also does not have an image about how he or she should behave, therefore there is no reason for that person to suffer, become victims of them. Normally we take things for granted, but a meditator should never take anything for granted – he starts from scratch, without any assumptions. Then there is an element of joy in

the experience, any experience can be a learning experience - we are not afraid, and we give up the idea of perfection.

A different point I would like to make is that it can become a trap when one takes to teaching. If one neglects one's own practice, then one falls into what can be described as a 'helping' syndrome. - this is one of the biggest dangers of teaching. Another is pride and conceit - one starts comparing oneself with other teachers, students start complementing one, and so on, and then fame and recognition come. Then it is easy to forget why one has taken to the spiritual path. Also, some teachers become fixated with particular techniques, and that gives rise to tension and rivalry between teachers who prefer other techniques - it's terrible, here you are, you're whole idea was to become free, and one has become a prisoner without realising it!

## 2: MEDITATION

**JYOTI:** *As we have some people with us who are fairly new to meditation I thought it might be interesting to explore some basic questions. I think it might be interesting for all of us to do this actually, because I was thinking earlier: Why did I start meditating? And it took me ages to remember! So I think we need to remind ourselves sometimes why we are doing meditation, otherwise it can become a habit like any other habit.*

*So, why do meditation at all? We all have very busy lives as students, or at work, or whatever it is we are engaged in, we have boy friends or girl friends or families to look after, there are books to read, the TV to watch, places to go to, social events to attend. So to find time for meditation is a great difficulty for a lot of people, and if they are to find time then they must have some reason for making this a priority in their lives.*

**GODWIN:** So let us explore this question: Why meditate? What I would suggest is that what one tries to do in meditation is to find out how our minds work experientially. To look at the different dimensions of our minds, and to understand our bodies. Then through that understanding to make an effort to free ourselves from conflict and conditioning. To first realise we are conditioned – that we have conflict, disappointments, frustration, and that we have stress – and then to come to an understanding of these things, to see what these things do to us, and then to see if it's possible to free ourselves from all that. Or, to put it another way, to see how far we can be free of our selfishness, self-centredness, and of our ego.

**JYOTI:** *So one of the things we are trying to do is to make what is unconscious conscious. We are reacting to the world all the time, but mostly we are not even aware that we are doing it – it just happens. So it is important to bring as much into the light of consciousness as possible, out of the hidden depths of the unconscious.*

**GODWIN:** When we explore our minds the unconscious is very important: what we carry in our unconscious is our repressions, those things we have pushed away and denied, and in meditation we see how far we can be open to these things, if we can allow them to come up, and if we can deal with them.

Another thing when we look at our minds is to see how our perceptions give rise to our conceptions – and how our conceptions can alter our perceptions also! Also we have to look at our bodies and sensations, how we relate to that, and what is the connection between the body and the mind.

Take, for example, the question of physical pain. Normally what do we do if there is physical pain? If we are sitting on the benches here and after a time pain arises, we move. Why? Because we don't like it. But by that response do we ever learn anything about pain? We just react in a very conditioned way. Now in meditation one tries to learn about pain, we try not to have that immediate, habitual, reaction. We might learn that physical pain gives rise to various psychological states – dislike, fear, anxiety, and so forth. So then we might try to see if it possible to have this physical pain without having the psychological reaction.

Related to pain, of course, is pleasure. We like pleasurable sensations to continue, and painful ones to stop. But in meditation we realise that what happens is often quite contrary to what we want. By wanting certain sensations to continue, conflict arises, because we have made a projection of how we want the world to be – but when the world doesn't live up to our expectations, then there is conflict.

Another area to try to explore in meditation is our relationships with other people, and with the world. Most of our problems and conflicts, as well as our joys and happiness, derive from our relationships: the way we relate to ourselves and to our environment. In meditation one learns to understand these relationships, and through that to learn about ourselves.

Also our emotions are an important area to inquire into. Now normally when we are angry, for instance, we are just angry, with no consciousness of how that anger is affecting our bodies, or what psychological complexes it gives rise to. With someone who is not a meditator, if we ask them: Why are you getting angry? Invariably you get the response that the other person is responsible, that they have provoked the anger. So now it is a very important aspect of meditation when one learns to take responsibility for what is happening in one's own mind, when you learn to no longer blame others – because that is the easy way out, if they are to blame you don't have to do anything about it.

*JYOTI: The first real insight I had in meditation was when I found out that a lot of what I didn't like in others, is what I had projected onto them. That was a real insight for me. I found through this experience that you can build up a lot of things you don't like about yourself, and then mask the problem by simply projecting it all onto others. Once I found out it was within myself I was able to deal with the problem, it had become accessible again.*

**GODWIN:** This brings up the point that we create a world of our own, from our conclusions, prejudices, expectations, and conditionings. Anything then that does not correspond to this private world we have constructed gives rise to suffering and conflict. In meditation we come to understand this process, then we can learn that problems are mainly in relation to one's own conclusions about how the world should be. To put it another way, we realise that a lot of what we are seeing is subjective, and then we try to see how that subjectivity operates. Gradually we see how far we can become objective, learning to see things as they are, not as they should or must be.

So there are all these things and also our motivations need enquiring into, the games we play with one another, and also the role playing we get involved in – one aspect of this is to see how many masks, personas, one puts on to keep the world at a distance. All of this comes under the eye of meditation.

*JYOTI: So perhaps now is good time to turn our attention to techniques. We have looked at some of the areas meditation deals with in regard to the psyche, but how do we get some sort of knowledge about these things?*

**GODWIN:** In meditation, in all the techniques, there is an aspect which is very much emphasised, and that is awareness. All techniques converge on two points: awareness and having an equanimous mind, a mind that is detached, a mind that is not identifying with things, a mind in a steady state of peace and calm.

Now why is awareness so important? Because it is the opposite of being like a machine, with awareness we become conscious of our reactions and responses, we build up self-knowledge and understanding.

*JYOTI: When we have more awareness and knowledge of how we are acting and reacting in the world, that gives rise to understanding, and understanding gives rise to compassion, because we can now see why it is that others are acting in a certain way. Therefore we can see also that self-knowledge helps us to understand others.*

**GODWIN:** If one has total awareness would it be possible to have things in the unconscious mind? I would suggest that what lies in the unconscious are in fact those areas that one is not aware of. If one has complete awareness and attention, if someone has cultivated that state, perhaps it would be possible to prevent things from falling into the unconscious – that’s an interesting idea, don’t you think?

Now as we were saying there are two types of meditation. In what is called concentration one learns to focus the mind on an object like the in- and out-breathing. Now when we focus like that there is an aspect of control in it, and exclusion, thoughts are arising and we push them away.

**JYOTI:** *Isn't one of the problems with this that it immediately gives rise to conflict? That's because there is your meditation object, and everything else that is clamouring for your attention.*

**GODWIN:** So how does one do concentration meditation without getting into conflict? The conflict rises if you take up the position that you should not have any other thoughts. So my whole emphasis when teaching mindfulness of breathing is on being aware of what is happening. Sometimes the way this meditation is presented one has the impression that one should be aware only of the breathing – which for most people is impossible. When thoughts, sensations, sounds, and so on arise one learns to be aware of them, without developing conflict.

Why are we doing concentration initially? Because we have to learn to have a mind that is still, to have some space in our minds, some calm. Otherwise, if we don’t do this there is confusion, disorder, distraction. When we can be more and more with the breath we establish stability.

That is the first step, when we have achieved a stable mind, and when we are alert, then we open up and let anything arise – this is choiceless awareness, and this is how we allow things from the unconscious to rise. In this meditation we don’t have an object, we allow any thought or emotion or sensation to arise, we are not afraid. We don’t make judgements.

In meditation in the first stage we are trying to work with what is there, we may have negative emotions, restlessness, anxiety, fear, guilt. Whilst learning to focus on an object, we at least learn how to push these emotions away, and when they are pushed away then the jhana factors arise – there is joy, happiness, one-pointedness, awareness. Positive emotions arise in the place of negative ones.

In the second phase we learn to be aware of both positive and negative without distinction, and to reflect them as they arise, just as they are. Joy arises and we reflect it just as in a mirror – and without the feeling this is ‘my’ joy, or ‘my’ restlessness – that is freedom, that is the model presented in the Dhamma.

**JYOTI:** *One of the things I've noticed is that if you can bring negative states into awareness, they drop away. This, I take it, is what the whole technique of psychoanalysis is about – if one can just look at these states without the need for repressing them it leads to them falling away. If you can catch yourself getting angry, for instance, then the anger just drops off as soon as you become aware of it – it isn't that you have had to do anything intentionally about it – it's quite a wonder that it works like that, but it does.*

**GODWIN:** That is why there is so much emphasis on awareness, without on the one hand repressing, and without on the other giving in to these negative emotions – these are the two

extremes that we avoid. To don't give energy to whatever is arising - if you start fighting these things there is a battle going on and we really give it more energy. We need to learn this from experience, otherwise what I'm saying just sounds theoretical, but if one can really experience this for oneself, this is really important. Then with that insight we become really open - no fear, no repression. That will give us a certain lightness, a certain joy, and a lot of confidence.

Now all of this sounds very simple, doesn't it?

*JYOTI: Well in a way it is really simple - but we are so very complicated, that's the problem! It's not that the techniques are complicated, or that meditation is hard, it's that we are!*

### 3: CONCEPT AND EXPERIENCE

**JYOTI:** *I thought tonight we might talk about the relationship between language and experience – meaning ‘language’ in the broad sense, to include the conceptual model that one holds to, such things as one’s religious beliefs and so on. I wanted to explore how language in this sense shapes one’s experience, but also how one’s experience shapes one’s language.*

*A second thing we could talk about, related to the first, is the relationship between the past and the present. There have been two emphases on this: some hold that there is really only a present, and what you have in the present is simply an idea about the past. Others say that there is really only the past – meaning, I think, that the past is so dominant that it overruns and shapes all our present experience, and to such a degree that one can hardly be said to be having any present experience at all.*

**GODWIN:** First let me offer some comments on how the past conditions us, and how it operates in regard to our senses. We know how fast agitations arise and how these agitations give rise to our perceptions, and our perceptions to our conceptions. It is a very strong conditioning that we have, and always our past starts operating when our senses operate because it happens automatically. There is a tendency in us to immediately recognise things and give them names. Sometimes the names we give are there without our realising that this is just conventional language we are using – and we sometimes become victims of this process, this is how our likes, dislikes, prejudices, and preferences arise. With this process it all happens so fast that we fail to see how it functions and what it does to our minds – this is where meditation and awareness come in.

**JYOTI:** *It can be a dismissive process can’t it? Something arises and then you categorise it, immediately you have dealt with it, and it can be put away. A very similar process happens with regard to repression: something comes up, the superego will say ‘this is not good’ and it is all dealt with so quickly that you never get to know it, it’s as though it doesn’t really exist, it’s simply put away in a little mental cupboard somewhere.*

**GODWIN:** So the question arises: Is it possible to see or hear without the past arising? Let’s take a practical example – listening to sounds. If we try and listen without conceptualising, one thing that might happen is that we may be able to listen to all the sounds -otherwise what happens is that with recognition and naming there is selectivity taking place, and we exclude other sounds when we recognise a particular sound. If we can learn to listen without the past then this selective process will not be operating, and one should be able to hear all the sounds, consequently you and the sound may become one. This is a very important meditation experience that can be called a non-dual experience, where the subject/object dichotomy disappears, the boundaries come down and you have a completely ego-less experience. There is only the listening taking place, nothing else, and without the concept of a listener.

Let me now go on to another aspect of being in the present. How can one experientially understand being in the here and the now? What prevents us from being in the present are our thoughts, because all our thoughts are about the past or the future. So in a sense being in the present implies having no thoughts, because when thoughts arise it is our memory that arises. Even thoughts about the future are related to the past – from the past we project into the future. When we recall the past and anticipate the future we forget we are doing it in the present. Only the present moment is real, but we forget this fact, and the result is that we take our past, and what we might be thinking about the future very seriously.

So now the question arises: Is it possible to be in the present always? Surely we cannot function without the past – if we didn't have the past, we wouldn't be able to recognise people, and if we never thought about the future then most of us wouldn't have gathered here tonight. So the crucial question is really: How do we *relate* to the past and the future?

Most of the so-called negative emotions which create our suffering are the result of recalling and anticipating. For example, depression can arise in relation to the past – what we have done – and anxiety can arise in relation to the future – what we might do! This is what has to be understood. With more awareness, more calm, more mastery over our minds, then we are in a position to make use of the past and the future functionally, and that's it. Similarly with the future. The problem is not with the past or the future, but with how we relate to them. How we make use of them. Awareness allows us to have distance and not to get so involved with the past and the future.

There is another aspect in relation to our past and future which brings up the question of concepts and conceptual thought and how it is related to our suffering. As meditators we are aware when thoughts arise in our minds, but if we are not very sharp, clear, and alert, what happens? Very soon, without realising it, one can construct stories out of these thoughts.

I will give an example based on the experience of a meditator here: She was sitting in this hall and realised that there was a mosquito biting her, and she thought that the mosquito might give her malaria ... but then she realised if she gets malaria, she will probably have to be admitted to hospital ... but if she goes to hospital, it will mean that there is a delay in returning to her home country ... but if that happens she will have to inform her mother, and tell her all that has happened – you laugh, but this is exactly what we do if we let ourselves be carried away by our thoughts, and without realising it we become victims of the stories that we are creating – but one has to see this for oneself in one's meditation.

Is there really any difference between the dreams we see in the night and our dreams we see in the day? In both situations we take what is happening as real. Only with meditation, with awareness, and alertness, can one see this process and prevent ourselves from being carried away by these stories and fantasies. I would suggest that an enlightened person is one who lives without stories, without constructions, and is in that way completely free.

*JYOTI: It's very difficult to become empty, it's very difficult to get thoughts out of one's mind, it's very difficult not to pursue thoughts that arise.*

**GODWIN:** As we all know it's not easy to get rid of thoughts, because by trying to get rid of thoughts what happens? More thoughts come. Sometimes I give a guided meditation and I say to the meditators here: Now ... just let any thought arise ... and can you guess what happens when I say that? No thoughts come! This is a very important thing to explore: when we don't want thoughts to arise, they arise: and when we want them to arise, they don't arise! What is the reason for this? Why are our minds acting in opposition to us?

These thoughts show the importance of making friends with our minds and with our thoughts – but hating thoughts and trying to be rid of thoughts we generate more thoughts and then a kind of opposition arises.

In meditation what we should try to do is to develop friendliness, gentleness in relation to our minds. The whole emphasis in meditation should be on understanding ourselves, and to do that we must make friends with our thoughts. If we just allow thoughts to arise, just

watch and observe them, it is fascinating. When I teach meditation to children I tell them that meditation is playing with our minds, we play and see what discoveries we can make.

One discovery we might make like this, is that our thoughts just arise in our minds arbitrarily, and that indicates that although we assume that this is 'my' mind, the mind has it's own way. It shows the extent to which we have no control over what is happening in our minds – isn't this a dangerous situation?

The same thing happens in our relationship with the world, we have an assumption that we are the masters, that we can control things – but just what exactly can we control? It is an illusion, and we have become victims of that illusion.

*JYOTI: This is a very interesting point, isn't it? If you have, let us say, an argument with someone, then the reality of it is that that was a momentary experience. But when you come and sit in meditation – or even if you if don't sit in meditation – that incident runs over and over again in the mind. Now, it seems to me that one time, as the circumstance arose, someone hurt you, but then a thousand times more we hurt ourselves by re-presenting this incident, by not being able to let it go.*

*It's quite interesting to see how the incident is re-presented in thought, because you change it, you think next time you would answer them differently, you would get the upper hand, and so on and on, over and over again. It even affects the body, when the incident occurred there was a rush of adrenaline, and then when you think of the incident again there's another, albeit smaller, rush of adrenaline, and you land up agitated.*

**GODWIN:** Now this brings up another point: which comes first, the thought or the emotion? The thought does surely. This shows that if we really know how to handle thoughts, that's it – if thoughts just come and pass away, and we remain unaffected by them, what's the problem? The mind remains clear, neutral, calm. The next stage is that thoughts slow down, and there is space between thoughts.

As I said in relation to listening, you come to realise that there is only thinking, and no thinker behind the thought, there is no entity independent of the process, there is no centre. Like a mirror you are just reflecting whatever there is. No need to ask for anything, no need to control anything – just being. Your will is not operating – your will is the culprit!

All our suffering is because of our thoughts, and this is why I emphasise being aware of thoughts so much – not only when we are sitting, but all the time.

## 4: EGO AND RELATIONSHIPS

**JYOTI:** *I thought we might discuss the ego and its discontents tonight. The concept of the ego is quite amorphous, but basically what I'd like to talk about is its nature as a separate self, and when we are constituted as a separate self, what that means for our relationships with others.*

*A second thing is this: there is probably no greater cause of misery in the world than the ego – so why do we hold onto something that is, by its very nature, going to cause us so much pain and suffering? Although I can see that people might do so in ignorance, still a lot of people sincerely want to get to a different level – but still they cling and hold onto their egos.*

**GODWIN:** Firstly, about this question of separateness – how does it come about? I think that one way in which this sense of separateness may arise could be from language: when we are children we are told that this is my body, and at some stage in development you experience that your body is separate from other peoples', and then that also extends to what one possesses also – thinking 'these things are mine', and that other things don't belong to you. So then there is a division, or boundary that is centered in relation to one's self and one's possessions.

That also extends to other things like identification on the group level: I'm a Sri Lankan, a German, or whatever it is. Or, I'm a Christian, a Buddhist, and so on. Then one considers oneself as distinct from and separate from others. In this connection the Buddha once said something very profound, he said: I use language, but I am not misled by language.

But when we use the word 'me' or 'mine' we really believe in this convention, and then a sense of ownership arises. As meditators we need to realise the limits of language and concepts and then perhaps we can get a glimpse of what it means to go beyond concepts.

Now I would like to look into another aspect, where we think we have control over our minds and bodies, and ask: How far is that correct?

**JYOTI:** *Well, it may not be absolutely correct, but nevertheless there does seem to be some of way in which I'm in control of my body that I'm not in regard to yours. For instance, if I want to lift my arm up it goes, but now if I say to you: lift your arm, it doesn't move! So it does seem to me that in an eminently practical way to be the case that I seem to have a closer connection with 'my' mind, with 'my' body, than I do with yours, or with anybody else's.*

*I think this is one of the reasons why the problem emerges in the first place – there really does seem to be a control over the microcosm of myself, that doesn't quite extend to the macrocosm of the world.*

**GODWIN:** I suppose that this is one way in which we might get an idea of separateness. Because we experience some degree of control over our minds and bodies the idea arises: I am the master, I am the captain. But I would suggest that this is a relative, and not an absolute experience. Let us look at some examples – our thoughts, for instance.

As we were saying before, thoughts just go through our minds without our having much control over them, we have to concede that a lot of the time they just arise on their own. Now let us look at the body, when we sit in meditation for an hour and a half at a stretch, can we sit in such a way that pain does not arise? Obviously, for most people, this is not the case.

But what does that show? That we have no control over the sensations that are arising on our bodies. This aspect is very much emphasised in the Dhamma. The real condition of living in *samsara* is a condition of absolute insecurity whether in regard to one's mind or body – we are really at the mercy of the four elements.

Now turning our attention to relationships. I often reflect how nearly all our conflicts are due to how we relate to ourselves, or to others. This is the problem of ownership. What we have to see, to realise, is that there is this mind and this body, but there is no owner. The idea of an owner is a construction of our imagination. This idea of ownership also extends to other people, so that we say: My girlfriend, my child, my mother. We assume that we own them, and with this concept the idea arises that whatever I possess should behave in a certain way – the way I have defined it.

*JYOTI: If you have ownership then you feel you have control, and then when things are not happening in the world according to how you would like them to, that's when the conflict arises, isn't it? If 'my' girlfriend goes off with another man, which is not how the situation would be if I could control it, then it gives rise to pain and distress.*

**GODWIN:** That's a good point. With the idea of ownership inevitably the idea of control arises. Another way of understanding the problem of relationship is that what we have done is to make a kind of bargain. You like someone, you give someone affection, and then you expect something in return, and if that is not forthcoming you start to dislike or even hate the other person. You feel cheated because it was an investment. It is through this sense of investment that various emotions arise: jealousy, rejection, hatred, and so forth. It shows how very quickly love can turn into hatred: but with unconditional love, that can never turn into hate.

*JYOTI: It's surprising how influential one little word can be, isn't it? If, for instance, as you are walking along someone says something nasty to you, then you go away feeling terrible. However, if, as you are walking along, someone smiles at you, you go away on a cloud! How very differently we react to these different occurrences, you are just going along being yourself, but suddenly how you feel has been radically changed.*

**GODWIN:** This brings up an important point, which is how dependent we are on other people. If we are praised we are happy, if we are blamed we get depressed. Our state of mind, our happiness, our suffering, is dependent on what others think about us.

*JYOTI: So perhaps now is a good time to discuss the second thing that I spoke about earlier, which is: Why do we hold onto this fixed idea of ourselves?*

**GODWIN:** I think there are a number of reasons for this. One reason is that we have simply got used to it. Secondly, we sometimes know things only intellectually, but realising things experientially is another thing altogether. Sometimes our insights happen with only a very limited part of our being, but if we are to experience these things properly then it must be with our whole being. Another thing could be that sometimes it's as though we have split personalities, in the sense that we carry around an image of ourselves, of what we really are, of what we should become. This can come about by repressing certain things.

Another reason could be because of the tricks our minds play on us: various subtleties, and self-deceptions that arise because of the defence mechanisms in our minds, so that we don't see clearly our own deficiencies and short comings, we rationalise certain things to ourselves. Our minds can play many such tricks on us. I like to give the example of pride:

maybe at some point you realise you are acting conceitedly, so then you start practising humility – but then you become proud of your humility! You want to impose it on others, and you want them to acknowledge that you are a humble person.

So I like to introduce the idea of playing with the ego. Not being so serious, so intent. There should be an element of joy in meditation. We should be able to laugh at our egos, just looking at all the trouble it causes us, then you will be able to get a certain distance on it. When you can learn to play with the ego, then the need to project any image can lessen. If one can learn to laugh at oneself, then we are not giving energy to this conflict between what we are, and what we should become.

Another interesting area is to observe how other peoples' egos are working – not in a judgmental way, of course – just to observe it very dispassionately: this can be very useful in our relationships with others, when we can learn about ourselves and others in this way.

*JYOTI: As I've said before this was one of the first things I ever learned in meditation, that a lot of what one sees, and doesn't like about others, is really something one has projected. Now if I meet someone and find I don't like them, when I sit in meditation I have a good long look at myself to see if what I don't like about them is not really something that I don't really like about myself. There's a certain insight to be gained in this way.*

**GODWIN:** It's a very good exercise. All of this shows us that what is most important is how one relates to oneself. If you truly understand yourself, you will understand your relations with others. Ordinarily we look at others only in a critical way, but this is simply a defence mechanism. People who are always over-critical of others don't yet understand themselves.

*JYOTI: When, in meditation, you come to an understanding of your own limitations, I think you can also at that point understand other peoples' limitations.*

**GODWIN:** Yes, in meditation we try and understand our limitations, that we still have imperfections. Otherwise we start beating ourselves because we are only human! This is how suffering and self-hatred can arise.

## 5: PROBLEMS IN MEDITATION

**JYOTI:** *I thought tonight we could look at something which sometimes puts people off meditation, which is the danger of developing self-centredness – I think a lot of people have a healthy instinct that tells them that introspection can be misapplied and become very narcissistic. The other side of the coin is, of course, that without self-knowledge we cannot develop true love and compassion – it's only when we see ourselves clearly and realise our need for forgiveness that we are prepared to forgive others for their shortcomings also.*

**GODWIN:** This is an interesting area to explore, and I have thought about this carefully over the years. There can be a danger in meditation, especially when trying to develop awareness, where, without knowing it, one may become very preoccupied and concerned with oneself, and then have utter disregard for all the people around you. This may result in an individual becoming deeply introspective in an unhealthy way.

So I suggest to people therefore two things: One is I always try to encourage people to focus their attention on things outside of themselves, developing their relationship with nature, for instance. With that focus one can then develop a good balance between intro – and extra-spection. The second thing is that I encourage people to relate to the people around them, to build up sensitivity and concern, to care for one another, to have compassion for one another, and to relate together as spiritual friends.

In this way one learns, in a meditation situation, how to relate to people around you, rather than to escape from them or simply avoid them. Withdrawing from people sometimes stems from the fact that people can hurt you, so rather than working with that situation, one finds that the easy thing to do is to escape from it.

There is an instance in a Buddhist text where a particular monk wanted to live in seclusion but the Buddha advised him against it, but still he insisted and so eventually off he went. His retreat wasn't very successful, and he returned to the Buddha who then recommended five guidelines, one of which is to have spiritual friends around you.

**JYOTI:** *In certain traditions you are not supposed to become a hermit until you have proved yourself able to live in a monastery. Community life can provide a stable, social framework within which you can come to understand yourself better. When you are at some level of perfection, it is then allowed that you can withdraw and live the life of a hermit, but not until that is accomplished first.*

*There is a story of one of the Christian desert fathers which is instructive in this regard. One of his resident pupils got angry when somebody said something deprecating to him, and the monk blamed the other for provoking him to anger. But the teacher said no, his anger had been there all the time, and the word had only served to bring it out into the open: the pupil was not free of defilement as he thought, it was just lying dormant.*

*Now this seems to be a very real problem, and I've personally seen it happen with a number of people, they withdraw from the world for a certain amount of time, and they've developed a certain sense of peace – but it's really very conditional, and sometimes amounts to little more than self-deception, and when they get back to the 'real' world they find that there is no real peace in them, and there they are getting angry and upset with everything just as they were before.*

**GODWIN:** The phrase I use is to say that the monsters are sleeping! The trouble is that you don't realise that they are only sleeping. So I try to encourage meditators not to put their

monsters to sleep, but to work with them, and to understand them, to make friends with them.

This is related to what is really meant by meditation, and what we are really trying to achieve. If you feel drawn by concentration techniques for instance it may be because that will serve to put your monsters to sleep for a certain time, and that gives you a sense of peace. Now initially this may be necessary in order to develop some calm and inner tranquillity, but eventually we need to develop some liberating insight.

**JYOTI:** *I've been thinking a lot about these three things: sila (moral virtue), samatha (calm and tranquillity), and panna (wisdom and insight), and it seems to me that each of these three help to develop the other. The more wisdom you have, the more moral you become: the more tranquil the mind, the greater the wisdom: the more moral or virtuous you are, the more tranquillity there is, and so on.*

**GODWIN:** That's certainly true, but in practical terms when you are introducing someone to meditation for the first time you have to get them to develop some sense of tranquillity first, later insight will start arising quite naturally; and when the mind is open for insight, concentration can arise quite naturally also.

However, sometimes I meet people who are so fixed on concentration that they cannot let go of that control, so that when one introduces them to awareness they can't handle it. So to be really making progress one needs to be able to do both, and that way they can certainly complement each other.

Concentration by itself can be a form of self-security. It can also strengthen the ego. This is why in the Dhamma choiceless awareness is always related to compassion. There is a beautiful word that is used: boundless compassion - it means having no religious boundaries, no racial boundaries, and so on, then your sense of separateness disappears, and you have a feeling of oneness, then there is real compassion, no differences between oneself and the other.

So now I will say something about the development of loving-kindness. With loving-kindness one begins by trying to feel friendly towards oneself. Why do we beat ourselves? Why do we dislike ourselves? One reason is that we have a model of what we are, and what we should become. But in loving-kindness we learn to feel really friendly, gentle, and kindly towards ourselves.

An important aspect of this is just learning to accept ourselves as we are. It doesn't mean that we will continue as we are without making progress, but first we must make friends with the situation. In loving-kindness we say: OK I'm still human, still imperfect, that's fine. Let me accept it and see what happens when we have learned to accept ourselves.