

A Dhamma Talk by

**Ajahn Chah**

## **Dedication to the Practice**

as edited by  
David Dalr Holmes

So I've told you a few brief stories about how I practised. I didn't have a lot of knowledge. I didn't study much. What I did study was this heart and mind of mine, and I learned in a natural way through experimentation, trial and error.

When I liked something, then I examined what was going on and where it would lead. Inevitably, it would drag me to some distant suffering. My practice was to observe myself. As understanding and insight deepened, gradually I came to know myself.

Practise with unflinching dedication! If you want to practise Dhamma, then please try not to think too much. If you're meditating and you find yourself trying to force specific results, then it's better to stop.

When your mind settles down to become peaceful and then you think, "That's it! That's it, isn't it? Is this it?," then stop. Take all your analytical and theoretical knowledge, wrap it up and store it away in a chest. And don't drag it out for discussion or to teach. That's not the type of knowledge that penetrates inside. They are different types of knowledge.

When the reality of something is seen, it's not the same as the

written descriptions. For example, let's say we write down the word "sensual desire." When sensual desire actually overwhelms the heart, it's impossible that the written word can convey the same meaning as the reality.

It's the same with "anger." We can write the letters on a blackboard, but when we're actually angry the experience is not the same. We can't read those letters fast enough, and the heart is engulfed by rage.

This is an extremely important point. The theoretical teachings are accurate, but it's essential to bring them into our hearts. It must be internalized. If the Dhamma isn't brought into the heart, it's not truly known. It's not actually seen.

I was no different. I didn't study extensively, but I did do enough to pass some of the exams on Buddhist theory. One day I had the opportunity to listen to a Dhamma talk from a meditation master. As I listened, some disrespectful thoughts came up. I didn't know how to listen to a real Dhamma talk. I couldn't figure out what this wandering meditation monk was talking about. He was teaching as though it was coming from his own direct experience, as if he was after the truth.

As time went on and I gained some firsthand experience in the practice, I saw for myself the truth of what that monk taught. I understood how to understand. Insight then followed in its wake.

Dhamma was taking root in my own heart and mind. It was a long, long time before I realized that everything that that wandering monk had taught came from what he'd seen for himself. The Dhamma he taught came directly from his own experience, not from a book. He spoke according to his understanding and insight. When I walked the

path myself, I came across every detail he'd described and had to admit he was right. So I continued on.

Try to take every opportunity you can to put effort into Dhamma practice. Whether it's peaceful or not, don't worry about it at this point.

The highest priority is to set the wheels of practice in motion and create the causes for future liberation. If you've done the work, there's no need to worry about the results. Don't be anxious that you won't gain results. Anxiety is not peaceful.

If however, you don't do the work, how can you expect results? How can you ever hope to see? It's the one who searches who discovers. It's the one who eats who's full. Everything around us lies to us.

Recognizing this even ten times is still pretty good. But the same old coot keeps telling us the same old lies and stories. If we know he's lying, it's not so bad, but it can be an exceedingly long time before we know. The old fellow comes and tries to hoodwink us with deception time and time again.

Practising Dhamma means upholding virtue, developing samádhi and cultivating wisdom in our hearts. Remember and reflect on the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Abandon absolutely everything without exception. Our own actions are the causes and conditions that will ripen in this very life. So strive on with sincerity.

Even if we have to sit in a chair to meditate, it's still possible to focus our attention. In the beginning we don't have to focus on many things—just our breath. If we prefer, we can mentally repeat the

word “Buddha,” “Dhamma,” or “Sangha” in conjunction with each breath.

While focusing attention, resolve not to control the breath. If breathing seems laborious or uncomfortable, this indicates we’re not approaching it right. As long as we’re not yet at ease with the breath, it will seem too shallow or too deep, too subtle or too rough.

However, once we relax with our breath, finding it pleasant and comfortable, clearly aware of each inhalation and exhalation, then we’re getting the hang of it. If we’re not doing it properly, we will lose the breath. If this happens, then it’s better to stop for a moment and refocus the mindfulness.

If while meditating you get the urge to experience psychic phenomena or the mind becomes luminous and radiant or you have visions of celestial palaces and so on, there’s no need to fear. Simply be aware of whatever you’re experiencing, and continue on meditating.

Occasionally, after some time, the breath may appear to slow to a halt. The sensation of the breath seems to vanish and you become alarmed. Don’t worry, there’s nothing to be afraid of. You only think your breathing has stopped. Actually the breath is still there, but it’s functioning on a much more subtle level than usual. With time the breath will return to normal by itself.

In the beginning, just concentrate on making the mind calm and peaceful. Whether sitting in a chair, riding in a car, taking a boat ride, or wherever you happen to be, you should be proficient enough in your meditation that you can enter a state of peace at will. When you get on a train and sit down, quickly bring your mind to a state of

peace. Wherever you are, you can always sit.

This level of proficiency indicates that you're becoming familiar with the path. You then investigate. Utilize the power of this peaceful mind to investigate what you experience.

At times it's what you see; at times what you hear, smell, taste, feel with your body, or think and feel in your heart. Whatever sensory experience presents itself—like it or not—take that up for contemplation. Simply know what you are experiencing.

Don't project meaning or interpretations onto those objects of sense awareness. If it's good, just know that it's good. If it's bad, just know that it's bad. This is conventional reality. Good or evil, it's all impermanent, unsatisfying and not-self. It's all undependable. None of it is worthy of being grasped or clung to. If you can maintain this practice of peace and inquiry, wisdom will automatically be generated.

Everything sensed and experienced then falls into these three pits of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. This is vipassaná meditation. The mind is already peaceful, and whenever impure states of mind surface, throw them away into one of these three rubbish pits. This is the essence of vipassaná: discarding everything down into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Good, bad, horrible, or whatever, toss it down.

In a short time, understanding and insight will blossom forth in the midst of the three universal characteristics—feeble insight, that is. At this beginning stage the wisdom is still weak and feeble, but try to maintain this practice with consistency.

It's difficult to put into words, but it's like if somebody wanted to get to know me, they'd have to come and live here. Eventually, with daily contact, we would get to know each other.

## Reference

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