

A Dhamma talk by

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Mastering the Meditation

as edited by
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If you have a look for yourself, you'll encounter certain experiences. There's a path to guide you and offer directions.

As you carry on, the situation changes and you have to adjust your approach to remedy the problems that come up. It can be a long time before you see a clear signpost.

If you're going to walk the same path as I did, the journey definitely has to take place in your own heart. If not, you'll encounter numerous obstacles.

It's just like hearing a sound. The hearing is one thing, the sound another, and we are consciously aware of both without compounding the event. We rely on nature to provide the raw material for the investigation in search of Truth.

Eventually the mind dissects and separates phenomena on its own. Simply put, the mind doesn't get involved.

When the ears pick up a sound, observe what happens in the heart and mind. Do they get bound up, entangled, and carried away by it? Do they get irritated? At least know this much. When a sound then registers, it won't disturb the mind.

Being here, we take up those things close at hand rather than those far away. Even if we'd like to flee from sound, there's no escape. The only escape possible is through training the mind to be unwavering in the face of sound. Set sound down.

The sounds we let go of, we can still hear. We hear, but we let sound go because we've already set it down. It's not that we have to forcefully separate the hearing and the sound, it separates automatically due to abandoning and letting go.

Even if we then wanted to cling to a sound, the mind wouldn't cling. Because once we understand the true nature of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and all the rest, and the heart sees with clear insight, everything sensed without exception falls within the domain of the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Anytime we hear a sound it's understood in terms of these universal characteristics.

Whenever there's sense contact with the ear, we hear but it's as if we didn't hear. This doesn't mean the mind no longer functions. *Mindfulness and the mind intertwine and merge to monitor each other at all times without a lapse.*

When the mind is trained to this level, no matter what path we then choose to walk, we will be doing research. We will be cultivating the analysis of phenomena, one of the essential factors of enlightenment, and this analysis will keep rolling on with its own momentum.

Discuss Dhamma with yourself. Unravel and release feeling, memory, perception, thinking, intentions, and consciousness. Nothing will be able to touch them as they continue to perform their functions on their own. For people who have mastered their minds,

this process of reflection and investigation flows along automatically. It's no longer necessary to direct it intentionally. Whatever sphere the mind inclines towards, the contemplation is immediately adept.

If Dhamma practice reaches this level, there's another interesting side benefit. While asleep: snoring, talking in our sleep, gnashing our teeth, and tossing and turning will all stop. Even if we've been resting in deep sleep, when we wake up we won't be drowsy. We'll feel energized and alert as if we'd been awake the whole time.

I used to snore, but once the mind remained awake at all times, snoring stopped. How can you snore when you're awake? It's only the body that stops and sleeps. The mind is wide awake day and night, around the clock. This is the pure and heightened awareness of the Buddha: the One Who Knows, the Awakened One, the Joyous One, the Brilliantly Radiant One.

This clear awareness never sleeps. Its energy is self-sustaining, and it never gets dull or sleepy. At this stage, we can go without rest for two or three days. When the body begins to show signs of exhaustion, we sit down to meditate and immediately enter deep samādhi for five or ten minutes. When we come out of that state, we feel fresh and invigorated as if we've had a full night's sleep.

If we're beyond concern for the body, sleep is of minimal importance. We take appropriate measures to care for the body, but we aren't anxious about its physical condition. Let it follow its natural laws. We don't have to tell the body what to do. It tells itself.

It's as if someone is prodding us, urging us to strive on in our efforts. Even if we feel lazy, there's a voice inside that constantly rouses our

diligence. Stagnation at this point is impossible, because effort and progress have gathered an unstoppable momentum. Please check this out for yourselves. You've been studying and learning a long time. Now it's time to study and learn about yourselves.

In the beginning stages of Dhamma practice, physical seclusion is of vital importance. When you live alone in isolation, you will recall the words of Venerable Sáriputta: "Physical seclusion is a cause and condition for the arising of mental seclusion, states of profound samádhi free from external sense contact. This seclusion of the mind is in turn a cause and condition for seclusion from mental defilements, enlightenment."

And yet some people still say that seclusion is not important, "If your heart is peaceful, it doesn't matter where you are." It's true, but in the beginning stages, we should remember that physical seclusion in a suitable environment comes first.

Today or sometime soon, seek out a lonely cremation ground in a remote forest far from any habitation. Experiment with living all alone. Or seek out a fear-inspiring mountain peak. Go live alone, Okay? You'll have lots of fun all night long. Only then will you know for yourself.

Even I once thought that physical seclusion wasn't particularly important. That's what I thought, but once I actually got out there and did it, I reflected on what the Buddha taught. The Blessed One encouraged his disciples to practise in remote locations far removed from society. In the beginning, this builds a foundation for internal seclusion of the mind, which then supports the unshakeable seclusion from defilements.

For example, say you're a lay person with a home and a family. What seclusion do you get? When you return home, as soon as you step inside the front door you get hit with chaos and complication. There's no physical seclusion. So you slip away for a retreat in a remote environment and the atmosphere is completely different. It's necessary to comprehend the importance of physical isolation and solitude in the initial stages of Dhamma practice.

You then seek out a meditation master for instruction. He or she guides, advises and points out those areas where your understanding is wrong, because it's precisely where you misunderstand that you think you are right. Right where you're wrong, you're sure you're right.

Once the teacher explains, you understand what is wrong, and right where the teacher says you're wrong is precisely where you thought you were right.

From what I've heard, there are a number of Buddhist scholar monks who search and research in accordance with the scriptures. There's no reason why we shouldn't experiment. When it's time to open our books and study, we learn in that style. But when it's time to take up arms and engage in combat, we have to fight in a style that may not correspond with the theory.

If a warrior enters battle and fights according to what he's read, he'll be no match for his opponent. When the warrior is sincere and the fight is real, he has to battle in a style that goes beyond theory. That's how it is. The Buddha's words in the scriptures are only guidelines and examples to follow, and studying can sometimes lead to carelessness.

The way of the Forest Masters is the way of renunciation. On this path there's only abandoning. We uproot views stemming from self-importance. We uproot the very essence of our sense of self. I assure you, this practice will challenge you to the core, but no matter how difficult it is, don't discard the Forest Masters and their teachings.

Without proper guidance the mind and samádhi are potentially very deluding. Things which shouldn't be possible begin to happen. I've always approached such phenomena with caution and care. When I was a young monk, just starting out in practice during my first few years, I couldn't yet trust my mind. However, once I'd gained considerable experience and could fully trust the workings of my mind, nothing could pose a problem.

Even if unusual phenomena manifested, I'd just leave it at that. If we are clued in to how these things work, they cease by themselves. It's all fuel for wisdom. As time goes on we find ourselves completely at ease.

In meditation, things which usually aren't wrong can be wrong. For example, we sit down cross-legged with determination and resolve: "Alright! No pussy-footing around this time. I will concentrate the mind. Just watch me." No way will that approach work! Every time I tried that my meditation got nowhere. But we love the bravado. From what I've observed, meditation will develop at its own rate.

Many evenings as I sat down to meditate I thought to myself, "Alright! Tonight I won't budge from this spot until at least 1:00 am." Even with this thought I was already making some bad kamma, because it wasn't long before the pain in my body attacked from all sides, overwhelming me until it felt like I was going to die. However, those occasions when the meditation went well, were

times when I didn't place any limits on the sitting. I didn't set a goal of 7:00, 8:00, 9:00 or whatever, but simply kept sitting, steadily carrying on, letting go with equanimity.

Don't force the meditation. Don't attempt to interpret what's happening. Don't coerce your heart with unrealistic demands that it enters a state of samádhi—or else you'll find it even more agitated and unpredictable than normal. Just allow the heart and mind to relax, comfortable and at ease.

Allow the breathing to flow easily at just the right pace, neither too short nor too long. Don't try to make it into anything special. Let the body relax, comfortable and at ease. Then keep doing it.

Your mind will ask you, “How late are we going to meditate tonight? What time are we going to quit?” It incessantly nags, so you have to bellow out a reprimand, “Listen buddy, just leave me alone.” This busybody questioner needs to be regularly subdued, because it's nothing other than defilement coming to annoy you.

Don't pay it any mind whatsoever. You have to be tough with it. “Whether I call it quits early or have a late night, it's none of your damn business! If I want to sit all night, it doesn't make any difference to anyone, so why do you come and stick your nose into my meditation?” You have to cut the nosy fellow off like that. You can then carry on meditating for as long as you wish, according to what feels right.

As you allow the mind to relax and be at ease, it becomes peaceful. Experiencing this, you'll recognize and appreciate the power of clinging. When you can sit on and on, for a very long time, going past midnight, comfortable and relaxed, you'll know you're getting

the hang of meditation. You'll understand how attachment and clinging really do defile the mind.

When some people sit down to meditate, they light a stick of incense in front of them and vow, "I won't get up until this stick of incense has burned down." Then they sit. After what seems like an hour they open their eyes and realize only five minutes have gone by. They stare at the incense, disappointed at how exceedingly long the stick still is. They close their eyes again and continue. Soon their eyes are open once more to check that stick of incense. These people don't get anywhere in meditation. Don't do it like that. Just sitting and dreaming about that stick of incense, "I wonder if it's almost finished burning," the meditation gets nowhere. Don't give importance to such things. The mind doesn't have to do anything special.

If we are going to undertake the task of developing the mind in meditation, don't let the defilement of craving know the ground rules or the goal. "How will you meditate, Venerable?" it inquires. "How much will you do? How late are you thinking of going?" Craving keeps pestering until we submit to an agreement.

Once we declare we're going to sit until midnight, it immediately begins to hassle us. Before even an hour has passed we're feeling so restless and impatient that we can't continue. Then more hindrances attack as we berate ourselves, "Hopeless! What? Is sitting going to kill you? You said you were going to make your mind unshakeable in samádhi, but it's still unreliable and all over the place. You made a vow and you didn't keep it."

Thoughts of self-depreciation and dejection assail our minds, and we sink into self-hatred. There's no one else to blame or get angry at,

and that makes it all the worse. Once we make a vow, we have to keep it. We either fulfil it or die in the process.

If we do vow to sit for a certain length of time, then we shouldn't break that vow and stop. In the meantime, however, just gradually practise and develop. There's no need for making dramatic vows. Try to steadily and persistently train the mind. Occasionally, the meditation will be peaceful, and all the aches and discomfort in the body will vanish. The pain in the ankles and knees will cease by itself.

Once we try our hand at cultivating meditation, if strange images, visions or sensory perceptions start coming up, the first thing to do is to check our state of mind. Don't discard this basic principle. For such images to arise the mind has to be relatively peaceful.

Don't crave for them to appear, and don't crave for them not to appear. If they do arise then examine them, but don't allow them to delude. Just remember they're not ours. They are impermanent, unsatisfying and not-self just like everything else. Even if they are real, don't dwell on or pay much attention to them.

If they stubbornly refuse to fade, then refocus your awareness on your breath with increased vigour. Take at least three long, deep breaths and each time slowly exhale completely. This may do the trick. Keep re-focusing the attention.

Don't become possessive of such phenomena. They are nothing more than what they are, and what they are is potentially deluding. Either we like them and fall in love with them or the mind becomes poisoned with fear. They're unreliable: they may not be true or what they appear to be. If you experience them, don't try to interpret their

meaning or project meaning onto them. Remember they're not ours, so don't run after these visions or sensations.

Instead, immediately go back and check the present state of mind. This is our rule of thumb. If we abandon this basic principle and become drawn into what we believe we are seeing, we can forget ourselves and start babbling or even go insane. We may lose our marbles to the point where we can't even relate to other people on a normal level.

Place your trust in your own heart. Whatever happens, simply carry on observing the heart and mind. Strange meditative experiences can be beneficial for people with wisdom, but dangerous for those without. Whatever occurs, don't become elated or alarmed. If experiences happen, they happen.

Another way to approach Dhamma practice is to contemplate and examine everything we see, do, and experience. Never discard the meditation. When some people finish sitting or walking meditation, they think it's time to stop and rest. They stop focusing their minds on their object of meditation or theme of contemplation. They completely drop it. Don't practise like that.

Whatever you see, inquire into what it really is. Contemplate the good people in the world. Contemplate the evil ones too. Take a penetrating look at the rich and powerful; the destitute and poverty-stricken. When you see a child, an elderly person or a young man or woman, investigate the meaning of age. Everything is fuel for inquiry. This is how you cultivate the mind.

The contemplation that leads to the Dhamma is the contemplation of conditionality, the process of cause and effect, in all its various

manifestations: both major and minor, black and white, good and bad. In short, everything. When you think, recognize it as a thought and contemplate that it's merely that, nothing more. All these things wind up in the graveyard of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self, so don't possessively cling to any of them. This is the cremation ground of all phenomena. Bury and cremate them in order to experience the Truth.

Having insight into impermanence means not allowing ourselves to suffer. It's a matter of investigating with wisdom. For example, we obtain something we consider good or pleasurable, and so we're happy. Take a close and sustained look at this goodness and pleasure. Sometimes after having it for a long time we get fed up with it. We want to give it away or sell it. If there's nobody who wants to buy it, we're ready to throw it away. Why? What are the reasons underlying this dynamic?

Everything is impermanent, inconstant, and changing, that's why. If we can't sell it or even throw it away, we start to suffer. This entire issue is just like that, and once one incident is fully understood, no matter how many more similar situations arise, they are all understood to be just the same. That's simply the way things are. As the saying goes, "If you've seen one, you've seen them all."

Occasionally we see things we don't like. At times, we hear annoying or unpleasant noises and get irritated. Examine this and remember it. Because some time in the future, we might like those noises. We might actually delight in those very same things we once detested. It's possible! Then it occurs to us with clarity and insight, "Aha! All things are impermanent, unable to fully satisfy, and not-self." Throw them into the mass grave of these universal characteristics. The clinging to the likeable things we get, have, and

are, will then cease. We come to see everything as essentially the same. Everything we then experience generates insight into the Dhamma.

Everything I've said so far is simply for you to listen to and think about. It's just talk, that's all. When people come to see me, I speak. These sorts of subjects aren't the things we should sit around and gab about for hours.

Just do it. Get in there and do it. It's like when we call a friend to go somewhere. We invite them. We get an answer. Then we're off, without a big fuss. We say just the right amount and leave it at that. I can tell you a thing or two about meditation, because I've done the work. But you know, maybe I'm wrong. Your job is to investigate and find out for yourself if what I say is true.

Reference

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