

A Dhamma Talk by

**Ajahn Chah**

## **Respect the Tradition**

as edited by  
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It's high time we started to meditate. Meditate to understand, to abandon, to relinquish, and to be at peace.

I used to be a wandering monk. I'd travel by foot to visit teachers and seek solitude. I didn't go around giving Dhamma talks. I went to listen to the Dhamma talks of the great Buddhist masters of the time. I didn't go to teach them. I listened to whatever advice they had to offer. Even when young or junior monks tried to tell me what the Dhamma was, I listened patiently.

However, I rarely got into discussions about the Dhamma. I couldn't see the point in getting involved in lengthy discussions. Whatever teachings I accepted I took on board straight away, directly where they pointed to renunciation and letting go. What I did, I did for renunciation and letting go.

We don't have to become experts in the scriptures. We're getting older with every day that passes, and every day we pounce on a mirage, missing the real thing. Practising the Dhamma is something quite different than studying it.

I don't criticize any of the wide variety of meditation styles and techniques. As long as we understand their true purpose and

meaning, they're not wrong. However, calling ourselves Buddhist meditators, but not strictly following the monastic code of discipline (*vinaya*) will, in my opinion, never meet with success.

Why? Because we try to bypass a vital section of the path. Skipping over virtue, *samádhi* or wisdom won't work. Some people may tell you not to get attached to the serenity of *samatha* meditation: "Don't bother with *samatha*; advance straight to the wisdom and insight practices of *vipassaná*." As I see it, if we attempt to detour straight to *vipassaná*, we'll find it impossible to successfully complete the journey.

Don't forsake the style of practice and meditation techniques of the eminent Forest Masters, such as the Venerable Ajahns Sao, Mun, Taungrut, and Upáli. The path they taught is utterly reliable and true—if we do it the way they did. If we follow in their footsteps, we'll gain true insight into ourselves.

Ajahn Sao cared for his virtue impeccably. He didn't say we should bypass it. If these great masters of the Forest Tradition recommended practising meditation and monastic etiquette in a particular way, then out of deep respect for them, we should follow what they taught. If they said to do it, then do it. If they said to stop because it's wrong, then stop. We do it out of faith. We do it with unwavering sincerity and determination. We do it until we see the Dhamma in our own hearts, until we are the Dhamma.

This is what the Forest Masters taught. Their disciples consequently developed profound respect, awe and affection for them, because it was through following their path, that they saw what their teachers saw.

Give it a try. Do it just like I say. If you actually do it, you'll see the Dhamma, be the Dhamma. If you actually undertake the search, what would stop you? The defilements of the mind will be vanquished if you approach them with the right strategy: be someone who renounces, one who is frugal with words, who is content with little, and who abandons all views and opinions stemming from self-importance and conceit. You will then be able to patiently listen to anyone, even if what they're saying is wrong. You will also be able to patiently listen to people when they're right.

Examine yourself in this way. I assure you, it's possible, if you try. Scholars however, rarely come and put the Dhamma into practice. There are some, but they are few. It's a shame. The fact that you've made it this far and have come to visit is already worthy of praise. It shows inner strength.

Some monasteries only encourage studying. The monks study and study, on and on, with no end in sight, and never cut that which needs to be cut. They only study the word "peace." But if you can stop still, then you'll discover something of real value. This is how you do research.

This research is truly valuable and completely immobile. It goes straight to what you've been reading about. If scholars don't practise meditation, however, their knowledge has little understanding. Once they put the teachings into practice, those things which they have studied about, then become vivid and clear.

So start practising! Develop this type of understanding. Give living in the forest a try and come stay in one of these tiny huts. Trying out this training for a while and testing it for yourself would be of far greater value than just reading books. Then you can have discussions

with yourself. While observing the mind it's as if it lets go and rests in its natural state. When it ripples and wavers from this still, natural state in the form of thoughts and concepts, the conditioning process of saòkhára is set in motion.

Be very careful and keep a watchful eye on this process of conditioning. Once it moves and is dislodged from this natural state, Dhamma practice is no longer on the right track. It steps off into either self-indulgence or self-torment. Right there. That's what gives rise to this web of mental conditioning. If the state of mind is a good one, this creates positive conditioning. If it's bad, the conditioning is negative. These originate in your own mind.

I'm telling you, it's great fun to closely observe how the mind works. I could happily talk about this one subject the whole day. When you get to know the ways of the mind, you'll see how this process functions and how it's kept going through being brainwashed by the mind's impurities.

I see the mind as merely a single point. Psychological states are guests who come to visit this spot. Sometimes this person comes to call; sometimes that person pays a visit. They come to the visitor centre. Train the mind to watch and know them all with the eyes of alert awareness. This is how you care for your heart and mind. Whenever a visitor approaches you wave them away. If you forbid them to enter, where are they going to sit down? There's only one seat, and you're sitting in it. Spend the whole day in this one spot.

This is the Buddha's firm and unshakeable awareness; that watches over and protects the mind. You're sitting right here. Since the moment you emerged from the womb, every visitor that's ever come to call has arrived right here. No matter how often they come, they

always come to this same spot, right here.

Knowing them all, the Buddha's awareness sits alone, firm and unshakeable. Those visitors journey here seeking to exert influence, to condition and sway your mind in various ways. When they succeed in getting the mind entangled in their issues, psychological states arise.

Whatever the issue is, wherever it seems to be leading, just forget it—it doesn't matter. Simply know who the guests are as they arrive. Once they've dropped by, they will find that there's only one chair, and as long as you're occupying it, they will have no place to sit down.

They come thinking to fill your ear with gossip, but this time there's no room for them to sit. Next time they come, there will also be no chair free. No matter how many times these chattering visitors show up, they always meet the same fellow sitting in the same spot.

You haven't budged from that chair. How long do you think they will continue to put up with this situation? In just speaking to them you get to know them thoroughly. Everyone and everything you've ever known since you began to experience the world will come for a visit. Simply observing and being aware right here is enough to see the Dhamma entirely. You discuss, observe, and contemplate by yourself.

This is how to discuss Dhamma. I don't know how to talk about anything else. I can continue on speaking in this fashion, but in the end it's nothing but talking and listening. I'd recommend you actually go and do the practice.

## Reference

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