

Unshakeable Peace

A Dhamma Talk

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as edited by
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The whole reason for studying the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, is to search for a way to transcend suffering and attain peace and happiness.

Whether we study physical or mental phenomena, the mind (*citta*) or its psychological factors (*cetasiká*), it's only when we make liberation from suffering our ultimate goal that we're on the right path—nothing less. Suffering has a cause and conditions for its existence.

Please clearly understand that when the mind is still, it's in its natural, normal state. As soon as the mind moves, it becomes conditioned (*saòkhára*). When the mind is attracted to something, it becomes conditioned.

When aversion arises, it becomes conditioned. The desire to move here and there arises from conditioning. If our awareness doesn't keep pace with these mental proliferations as they occur, the mind will chase after them and be conditioned by them. Whenever the mind moves, at that moment, it becomes a conventional reality.

So the Buddha taught us to contemplate these wavering conditions of the mind. Whenever the mind moves, it becomes unstable and

impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and cannot be taken as a self (*anattá*). These are the three universal characteristics of all conditioned phenomena. The Buddha taught us to observe and contemplate these movements of the mind.

It's likewise with the teaching of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppáda*): ignorance (*avijjá*) is the cause and condition for the arising of volitional kammic formations (*saòkhára*); which is the cause and condition for the arising of consciousness (*viññáóa*); which is the cause and condition for the arising of mentality and materiality (*náma-rúpa*), and so on, just as we've studied in the scriptures.

The Buddha separated each link of the chain to make it easier to study. This is an accurate description of reality, but when this process actually occurs in real life the scholars aren't able to keep up with what's happening. It's like falling from the top of a tree to come crashing down to the ground below. We have no idea how many branches we've passed on the way down.

Similarly, when the mind is suddenly hit by a mental impression, if it delights in it, then it flies off into a good mood. It considers it good without being aware of the chain of conditions that led there. The process takes place in accordance with what is outlined in the theory, but simultaneously it goes beyond the limits of that theory.

There's nothing that announces, "This is delusion. These are volitional kammic formations, and that is consciousness." The process doesn't give the scholars a chance to read out the list as it is happening.

Although the Buddha analyzed and explained the sequence of mind moments in minute detail, to me it's more like falling out of a tree. As we come crashing down there's no opportunity to estimate how

many feet and inches we've fallen. What we do know is that we've hit the ground with a thud and it hurts!

The mind is the same. When it falls for something, what we're aware of is the pain. Where did all this suffering, pain, grief, and despair come from? It didn't come from theory in a book. There isn't anywhere where the details of our suffering are written down. Our pain won't correspond exactly with the theory, but the two travel along the same road. So scholarship alone can't keep pace with the reality.

That's why the Buddha taught to cultivate clear knowing for ourselves. Whatever arises, arises in this knowing. When that which knows, knows in accordance with the truth, then the mind and its psychological factors are recognized as not ours. Ultimately, all these phenomena are to be discarded and thrown away as if they were rubbish. We shouldn't cling to or give them any meaning.

Theory and Reality

The Buddha did not teach about the mind and its psychological factors so that we'd get attached to the concepts. His sole intention was that we would recognize them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. Then let go. Lay them aside. Be aware and know them as they arise.

This mind has already been conditioned. It's been trained and conditioned to turn away and spin out from a state of pure awareness. As it spins, it creates conditioned phenomena that further influence the mind, and the proliferation carries on. The process gives birth to the good, the evil, and everything else under the sun.

The Buddha taught to abandon it all. Initially, however, you have to familiarize yourself with the theory in order that you'll be able to

abandon it all at the later stage. This is a natural process. The mind is just this way. Psychological factors are just this way.

Take the Noble Eightfold Path, for example. When wisdom (*paññá*) views things correctly with insight, this right view then leads to right intention, right speech, right action, and so on. This all involves psychological conditions that have arisen from that pure knowing awareness. This knowing is like a lantern shedding light on the path ahead on a dark night. If the knowing is right, is in accordance with truth, it will pervade and illuminate each of the other steps on the path in turn. Whatever we experience, it all arises from within this knowing. If this mind did not exist, the knowing would not exist either. All this is a mental phenomenon.

As the Buddha said, the mind is merely the mind: it's not a being, a person, a self, or yourself; it's neither us nor them. The Dhamma is simply the Dhamma. It is a natural, selfless process. It does not belong to us or anyone else. It isn't any thing. Whatever a person experiences, it all falls within five fundamental categories (*khandhas*): body, feeling, perception, thoughts and consciousness. The Buddha said to let it all go.

Meditation is like a single stick of wood. Insight (*vipassaná*) is one end of the stick and serenity (*samatha*) the other. If we pick it up, does only one end come up or do both? When anyone picks up a stick, both ends rise together. Which part then is *vipassaná*, and which is *samatha*? Where does one end and the other begin? They are both the mind.

As the mind becomes peaceful, initially the peace will arise from the serenity of *samatha*. We focus and unify the mind in states of meditative peace (*samádhi*). However, if the peace and stillness of *samádhi* fades away, suffering arises in its place. Why is that?

Because the peace afforded by samatha meditation alone is still based on attachment. This attachment can then be a cause of suffering. Serenity is not the end of the Path.¹ The Buddha saw from his own experience that such peace of mind was not the ultimate. The causes underlying the process of existence (*bhava*) had not yet been brought to cessation (*nirodha*). The conditions for rebirth still existed. His spiritual work had not yet attained perfection. Why?

Because there was still suffering. So based on that serenity of samatha he proceeded to contemplate, investigate, and analyze the conditioned nature of reality until he was free of all attachments, even the attachment to serenity.

Serenity is still part of the world of conditioned existence and conventional reality. Clinging to this type of peace is clinging to conventional reality, and as long as we cling, we will be mired in existence and rebirth. Delighting in the peace of samatha still leads to further existence and rebirth. Once the mind's restlessness and agitation calms down, one clings to the resultant peace.

So the Buddha examined the causes and conditions underlying existence and rebirth. As long as he had not yet fully penetrated the matter and understood the truth, he continued to probe deeper and deeper with a peaceful mind, reflecting on how all things, peaceful or not, come into existence.

His investigation forged ahead until it was clear to him that everything that comes into existence is like a lump of red-hot iron. The five categories of a being's experience (*khandhas*) are all a lump of red-hot iron. When a lump of iron is glowing red-hot, is there anywhere it can be touched without getting burnt? Is there anywhere at all that is cool? Try touching it on the top, the sides, or underneath. Is there a single spot that can be found that's cool?

Impossible! This searing lump of iron is entirely red-hot. We can't even attach to serenity.

If we identify with that peace, assuming that there is someone who is calm and serene, this reinforces the sense that there is an independent self or soul. This sense of self is part of conventional reality. Thinking, "I'm peaceful," "I'm agitated," "I'm good," "I'm bad," "I'm happy," or "I'm unhappy," we are caught in more existence and birth. It's more suffering. If our happiness vanishes, then we're unhappy instead. When our sorrow vanishes, then we're happy again. Caught in this endless cycle, we revolve repeatedly through heaven and hell.

Before his enlightenment, the Buddha recognized this pattern in his own heart. He knew that the conditions for existence and rebirth had not yet ceased. His work was not yet finished.

Focusing on life's conditionality, he contemplated in accordance with nature: "Due to this cause there is birth, due to birth there is death, and all this movement of coming and going."

So the Buddha took up these themes for contemplation in order to understand the truth about the five khandhas. Everything mental and physical, everything conceived and thought about, without exception, is conditioned. Once he knew this, he taught us to set it down. Once he knew this, he taught to abandon it all. He encouraged others to understand in accordance with this truth. If we don't, we'll suffer. We won't be able to let go of these things. However, once we do see the truth of the matter, we'll recognize how these things delude us.

The Buddha taught that the mind has no substance; it isn't any thing. The mind isn't born belonging to anyone. It doesn't die as anyone's.

This mind is free, brilliantly radiant, and unentangled with any problems or issues.

The reason problems arise is because the mind is deluded by conditioned things, deluded by this misperception of self. So the Buddha taught to observe this mind. In the beginning what is there? There is truly nothing there. It doesn't arise with conditioned things, and it doesn't die with them. When the mind encounters something good, it doesn't change to become good. When the mind encounters something bad, it doesn't become bad as well. That's how it is when there is clear insight into one's nature. There is understanding that this is essentially a substanceless state of affairs.

The Buddha's insight saw it all as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. He wants us to fully comprehend in the same way. The knowing then knows in accordance with truth. When it knows happiness or sorrow, it remains unmoved. The emotion of happiness is a form of birth. The tendency to become sad is a form of death. When there's death there is birth, and what is born has to die. That which arises and passes away is caught in this unremitting cycle of becoming. Once the meditator's mind comes to this state of understanding, no doubt remains about whether there is further becoming and rebirth. There's no need to ask anyone else.

The Buddha comprehensively investigated conditioned phenomena and so was able to let them all go. The five khandhas were let go of, and the knowing carried on merely as an impartial observer of the process. If he experienced something positive, he didn't become positive along with it. He simply observed and remained aware. If he experienced something negative, he didn't become negative. And why was that? Because his mind had been cut free from such causes and conditions. He'd penetrated the Truth. The conditions leading to

rebirth no longer existed.

This is the knowing that is certain and reliable. This is a mind that is truly at peace. This is what is not born, doesn't age, doesn't get sick, and doesn't die. This is neither cause nor effect, nor dependent on cause and effect. It is independent of the process of causal conditioning. The causes then cease with no conditioning remaining.

This mind is above and beyond birth and death, above and beyond happiness and sorrow, above and beyond both good and evil. What can you say? It's beyond the limitations of language to describe it. All supporting conditions have ceased and any attempt to describe it will merely lead to attachment. The words used then become the theory of the mind.

Theoretical descriptions of the mind and its workings are accurate, but the Buddha realized that this type of knowledge was relatively useless. We understand something intellectually and then believe it, but it's of no real benefit. It doesn't lead to peace of mind.

The knowing of the Buddha leads to letting go. It results in abandoning and renunciation. Because it's precisely this mind that leads us to get involved with both what's right and what's wrong. If we're smart we get involved with those things that are right. If we're stupid we get involved with those things that are wrong. Such a mind is the world, and the Blessed One took the things of this world to examine this very world. Having come to know the world as it actually was, he was then known as the "One who clearly comprehends the world" (*lokavidú*).

Concerning this issue of samatha and vipassaná, the important thing is to develop these states in our own hearts. Only when we genuinely cultivate them ourselves will we know what they actually are. We

can go and study what all the books say about psychological factors of the mind, but that kind of intellectual understanding is useless for actually cutting off selfish desire, anger, and delusion.

We only study the theory about selfish desire, anger, and delusion, merely describing the various characteristics of these mental defilements: “Selfish desire has this meaning; anger means that; delusion is defined as this.” Only knowing their theoretical qualities, we can talk about them only on that level. We know and we are intelligent, but when these defilements actually appear in our minds, do they correspond with the theory or not?

When, for instance, we experience something undesirable do we react and get into a bad mood? Do we attach? Can we let it go? If aversion comes up and we recognize it, do we still hang on to it? Or once we have seen it, do we let it go? If we find that we see something we don't like and retain that aversion in our hearts, we'd better go back and start studying again. Because it's still not right. The practice is not yet perfect. When it reaches perfection, letting go happens. Look at it in this light.

We truly have to look deeply into our own hearts if we want to experience the fruits of this practice. Attempting to describe the psychology of the mind in terms of the numerous separate moments of consciousness and their different characteristics is, in my opinion, not taking the practice far enough. There's still a lot more to it. If we are going to study these things, then know them absolutely, with clarity and penetrative understanding. Without clarity of insight, how will we ever be finished with them? There's no end to it. We'll never complete our studies.

Practising Dhamma is thus extremely important. When I practised,

that's how I studied. I didn't know anything about mind moments or psychological factors. I just observed the quality of knowing. If a thought of hate arose, I asked myself why. If a thought of love arose, I asked myself why. This is the way. Whether it's labelled as a thought or called a psychological factor, so what? Just penetrate this one point until you're able to resolve these feelings of love and hate, until they completely vanish from the heart. When I was able to stop loving and hating under any circumstance, I was able to transcend suffering. Then it doesn't matter what happens, the heart and mind are released and at ease. Nothing remains. It has all stopped.

Practise like this. If people want to talk a lot about theory, that's their business. But no matter how much it's debated, the practice always comes down to this single point *right here*. When something arises, it arises right here. Whether a lot or a little, it originates *right here*. When it ceases, the cessation is *right here*. Where else?

The Buddha called this point the "knowing." When it knows the way things are accurately, in line with the truth, we'll understand the meaning of mind. Things incessantly deceive. As you study them, they're simultaneously deceiving you. How else can I put it? Even though you know about them, you are still being deluded by them precisely where you know them. That's the situation.

The issue is this: in my opinion the Buddha didn't intend that we only know what these things are called; the aim of the Buddha's teachings is to figure out the way to liberate ourselves from these things through searching for the underlying causes.

Reference

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