

# Vipassana Discourse Day 10

## *Review of the technique*

Ten days are over. Let us review what you have done during these ten days. You started your work by taking refuge in the Triple Gem, that is, in Buddha, in Dhamma, in Sangha. By doing so you were not being converted from one organized religion to another. In Vipassana the conversion is only from misery to happiness, from ignorance to wisdom, from bondage to liberation. The entire teaching is universal. You took refuge not in a personality, dogma, or sect, but in the quality of enlightenment. Someone who discovers the way to enlightenment is a Buddha. The way that he finds is called the Dhamma. All who practice this way and reach the stage of saintliness are called Sangha. Inspired by such persons, one takes refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha in order to attain the same goal of purity of mind. The refuge is actually in the universal quality of enlightenment which one seeks to develop in oneself.

At the same time, in any person who progresses on the path there will arise a feeling of gratitude and also a volition to serve others without expecting anything in return. These two qualities were notable in Siddhattha Gotama, the historical Buddha. He had achieved enlightenment entirely by his own efforts. Nevertheless, out of compassion for all beings, he sought to teach the technique he had found to others.

The same qualities will appear in all who practice the technique and who eradicate, to some extent, the old habit of egotism. The real refuge, the real protection, is the Dhamma that you develop in yourself. However, along with the experience of Dhamma there is bound to grow a feeling of gratitude to Gotama the Buddha for finding and teaching this technique, and gratitude as well to those

who selflessly strove to maintain the teaching in its original purity through twenty-five centuries to the present day.

With this understanding you took refuge in the Triple Gem.

Next you took five precepts. This was not a rite or ritual. By taking these precepts and following them you practiced *sīla*, morality, which is the foundation of the technique. Without a strong foundation the entire structure of meditation would be weak. *Sīla* is also universal and nonsectarian. You undertook to abstain from all actions, physical or vocal, that would disturb the peace and harmony of others. One who breaks these precepts must first develop great impurity in the mind, destroying his own peace and harmony. From the mental level the impurity develops and expresses itself vocally or physically. In Vipassana you are trying to purify the mind so that it becomes really calm and peaceful. You cannot work to purify the mind while you still continue to perform actions that agitate and defile it.

But how are you to break out of the vicious cycle in which the agitated mind performs unwholesome actions that agitate it still further? A Vipassana course gives you the opportunity. Because of the heavy program, the strict discipline, the vow of silence, and the strongly supportive atmosphere, there is hardly any likelihood of your breaking the five precepts. Thus, during the ten days you are able to practice *sīla*, and with this base you can develop *samādhī*; and this in turn becomes the base for insight, with which you can penetrate to the depths of the mind and purify it.

During the course you undertook to observe the five precepts in order to be able to learn this technique. Having learned it, one who then decides to accept and practice Dhamma must observe the precepts throughout life.

Next you surrendered to the Buddha and your present teacher for the ten days of the course. This surrender was for the purpose of giving a fair trial to the technique. Only someone who has surrendered in this way can work putting forth full efforts. One who is full of doubts and skepticism cannot work properly. However, surrendering does not mean developing blind faith; that has nothing to do with Dhamma. If any doubt arose in the mind, you were encouraged to come to the teacher as often as necessary for clarification.

The surrender was also to the discipline and timetable of the course. These were designed, based on the experience of thousands of previous students, to enable you to work continuously so as to derive the greatest possible advantage from these ten days.

By surrendering you undertook to work exactly as you were asked. Whatever techniques you might have been practicing previously you were asked to lay aside for the period of the course. You could obtain the benefit and judge the value of the technique only by practicing it exclusively, in the proper way. Mixing techniques, on the other hand, could have led you into serious difficulties.

Then you started your work by practicing Anapana meditation in order to develop mastery of the mind, concentration--*samādhī*. You were told to observe mere, natural breath without adding any word, shape, or form. One reason for this restriction was to preserve the universality of the technique: breath is common and acceptable to everyone, but a word or form may be acceptable to some and not to others.

But there is a more important reason for observing mere respiration. The whole process is an exploration of the truth about oneself, about the mental-physical structure as it is, not as you

would like it to be. It is an investigation of reality. You sit down and close your eyes. There is no sound, no outside disturbance, no movement of the body. At that moment the most prominent activity within yourself is respiration. You begin by observing this reality: natural breath, as it enters and leaves the nostrils. When you could not feel the breath, you were permitted to breathe slightly hard, just to fix your attention in the area of the nostrils, and then once again you came back to natural, normal, soft breathing. You started with this gross, apparent truth, and from it you moved further, deeper, in the direction of subtler truths, of ultimate truth. On the entire path, at every step you remain with the truth that you actually experience, from the grossest to the subtlest. You cannot reach ultimate truth by starting with an imagination. You will only become entangled in greater imaginations, self-deceptions.

If you had added a word to the object of respiration, you might have concentrated the mind more quickly, but there would have been a danger in doing so. Every word has a particular vibration. By repeating a word or phrase, one creates an artificial vibration in which one becomes engulfed. At the surface level of the mind a layer of peace and harmony is created, but in the depths impurities remain. The only way to get rid of these deep lying impurities is to learn how to observe them, how to bring them to the surface so that they may pass away. If one observes only a particular artificial vibration, one will not be able to observe the various natural vibrations related to one's impurities, that is, to observe the sensations arising naturally within the body. Therefore, if one's purpose is to explore the reality of oneself and to purify the mind, to use an imaginary word can create obstacles. Similarly, visualization--mentally picturing a shape or form--can become a barrier to progress. The technique leads to the

dissolving of apparent truth in order to reach ultimate truth. Apparent, integrated truth is always full of illusions, because at this level *saññā* operates, perception, which is distorted by past reactions. This conditioned perception differentiates and discriminates, giving rise to preferences and prejudices, to fresh reactions. But by disintegrating apparent reality, one gradually comes to experience the ultimate reality of the mental-physical structure: nothing but vibrations arising and passing away every moment. At this stage no differentiation is possible, and therefore no preferences or prejudices can arise, no reactions. The technique gradually weakens the conditioned *saññā* and hence weakens reactions, leading to the stage in which perception and sensation cease, that is, the experience of *nibbāna*. But by deliberately giving attention to a shape, form, or vision, one remains at the level of apparent, composed reality and cannot advance beyond it. For this reason, there should be neither visualization nor verbalization.

Having concentrated the mind by observing natural breath, you started to practice Vipassana meditation in order to develop *paññā*--wisdom, insight into your own nature, which purifies the mind. From head to feet, you began observing natural sensations within the body, starting on the surface and then going deeper, learning to feel sensations outside, inside, in every part of the body.

Observing reality as it is, without any preconceptions, in order to disintegrate apparent truth and to reach ultimate truth--this is Vipassana. The purpose of disintegrating apparent reality is to enable the meditator to emerge from the illusion of "I". This illusion is at the root of all our craving and aversion, and leads to great suffering. One may accept intellectually that it is an illusion, but this acceptance is not enough to end suffering. Regardless of

religious or philosophical beliefs, one remains miserable so long as the habit of egotism persists. In order to break this habit, one must experience directly the insubstantial nature of the mental-physical phenomenon, changing constantly beyond one's control. This experience alone can dissolve egotism, leading to the way out of craving and aversion, out of suffering.

The technique therefore is the exploration, by direct experience, of the real nature of the phenomenon that one calls "I, mine". There are two aspects of this phenomenon: physical and mental, body and mind. The meditator begins by observing the reality of the body. To experience this reality directly, one must feel the body, that is, must be aware of sensations throughout the body. Thus, observation of body--*kāyānupassanā*--necessarily involves observation of sensations--*vedanānupassanā*. Similarly, one cannot experience the reality of the mind apart from what arises in the mind. Thus, observation of mind--*cittānupassanā*- - necessarily involves observation of the mental contents--*dhammānupassanā*.

This does not mean that one should observe individual thoughts. If you try to do that, you will start rolling in the thoughts. You should simply remain aware of the nature of the mind at this moment; whether craving, aversion, ignorance, and agitation are present or not. And whatever arises in the mind, The Buddha discovered, will be accompanied by a physical sensation. Hence whether the meditator is exploring the mental or the physical aspect of the phenomenon of "I", awareness of sensation is essential.

This discovery is the unique contribution of the Buddha, of central importance in his teaching. Before him in India and among his contemporaries, there were many who taught and practiced *sīla* and *samādhi*. *paññā* also existed, at least

devotional or intellectual wisdom: it was commonly accepted that mental defilements are the source of suffering, that craving and aversion must be eliminated in order to purify the mind and to attain liberation. The Buddha simply found the way to do it.

What had been lacking was an understanding of the importance of sensation. Then as now, it was generally thought that our reactions are to the external objects of sense--vision, sound, odour, taste, touch, thoughts. However, observation of the truth within reveals that between the object and the reaction is a missing link: sensation. The contact of an object with the corresponding sense door gives rise to sensation; the *saññā* assigns a positive or negative valuation, in accordance with which the sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant, and one reacts with craving or aversion. The process occurs so rapidly that conscious awareness of it develops only after a reaction has been repeated many times and has gathered dangerous strength sufficient to overpower the mind. To deal with the reactions, one must become aware of them at the point where they start; they start with sensation, and so one must be aware of sensations. The discovery of this fact, unknown before him, enabled Siddhattha Gotama to attain enlightenment, and this is why he always stressed the importance of sensation. Sensation can lead to reactions of craving and aversion and hence to suffering, but sensation can also lead to wisdom with which one ceases reacting and starts to emerge from suffering.

In Vipassana, any practice that interferes with the awareness of sensation is harmful, whether it is concentrating on a word or form, or giving attention merely to physical movements of the body or to thoughts arising in the mind. You cannot eradicate suffering unless you go to its source, sensation.



The technique of Vipassana was explained by the Buddha in the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, the "Discourse on the Establishing of Awareness." This discourse is divided into sections examining the various aspects of the technique; observation of body, of sensations, of mind, and of the mental contents. However, each division or subdivision of the discourse concludes with the same words. There may be different points from which to begin the practice, but no matter what the starting point, a meditator must pass through certain stations, certain experiences on the path to the final goal. These experiences, essential to the practice of Vipassana, are described in the sentences repeated at the conclusion of each section.

The first such station is that in which one experiences arising (*samudaya*) and passing away (*vaya*) separately. At this stage the meditator is aware of consolidated, integrated reality in the form of gross sensations within the body. One is aware of a sensation, perhaps a pain, arising. It seems to stay for some time and ultimately it passes away.

Going further beyond this station, one penetrates to the stage of *samudaya-vaya*, in which one experiences arising and passing away simultaneously, without any interval between them. The gross, consolidated sensations have dissolved into subtle vibrations, arising and falling with great rapidity, and the solidity of the mental-physical structure disappears. Solidified, intensified emotion and solidified, intensified sensation both dissolve into nothing but vibration. This is the stage of *bhanga*--dissolution--in which one experiences the ultimate truth of mind and matter: constantly arising and passing away, without any solidity.

This *bhanga* is a very important station on the path, because only when one experiences the dissolution of the mental-physical structure does attachment to it go away. Then one becomes



detached in the face of any situation; that is, one enters the stage of *saṅkhārā-upekkhā*. Very deep lying impurities--*saṅkhārā*--buried in the unconscious now start appearing at the surface level of the mind. This is not a regression; it is a progress, for unless they come to the surface, the impurities cannot be eradicated. They arise, one observes equanimously, and they pass away one after another. One uses the gross, unpleasant sensations as tools with which to eradicate the old stock of *saṅkhārā* of aversion; one uses the subtle, pleasant sensations as tools with which to eradicate the old stock of *saṅkhārā* of craving. Thus, by maintaining awareness and equanimity towards every experience, one purifies the mind of all the deep-lying complexes, and approaches closer and closer to the goal of *nibbāna*, of liberation.

Whatever the starting point, one must pass through all these stations in order to reach *nibbāna*. How soon one may reach the goal depends on how much work one does, and how large an accumulation of past *saṅkhārā* one has to eradicate.

In every case, however, in every situation, equanimity is essential, based on an awareness of sensations. *Saṅkhārā* arise from the point of physical sensation. By remaining equanimous towards sensation, you prevent new *saṅkhārā* from arising, and you also eliminate the old ones. Thus, by observing sensations equanimously, you gradually progress towards the final goal of liberation from suffering.

Work seriously. Do not make a game of meditation, lightly trying one technique after another without pursuing any. If you do so, you will never advance beyond the initial steps of any technique, and therefore you will never reach the goal. Certainly, you may make trials of different techniques in order to find one that suits you. You may also give two or three trials to this technique, if needed. But do not waste your entire life merely in giving trials.

Once you find a technique to be suitable, work at it seriously so that you may progress to the final goal.

May suffering people everywhere find the way out of their misery.

*May all beings be happy!*