

Vipassana Discourse Day 11

How to continue practicing after the end of the course.

Working one day after the other, we have come to the closing day of this Dhamma seminar. When you started the work, you were asked to surrender completely to the technique and discipline of the course. Without this surrender, you could not have given a fair trial to the technique. Now ten days are over; you are your own master. When you return to your home, you will review calmly what you have done here. If you find that what you have learned here is practical, logical, and beneficial to yourself and to all others, then you should accept it--not because someone has asked you to do so, but with a free will, of your own accord; not just for ten days, but for your whole life.

The acceptance must be not merely at the intellectual or emotional level. One has to accept Dhamma at the actual level by applying it, making it a part of one's life, because only the actual practice of Dhamma will give tangible benefits in daily life.

You joined this course to learn how to practice Dhamma--how to live a life of morality, of mastery over one's mind, of purity of mind. Every evening, Dhamma talks were given merely to clarify the practice. It is necessary to understand what one is doing and why, so that one will not become confused or work in a wrong way. However, in the explanation of the practice, certain aspects of the theory inevitably were mentioned, and since different people from different backgrounds come to a course, it is quite possible that some may have found part of the theory unacceptable. If so, never mind, leave it aside. More important is the practice of Dhamma. No one can object to living a life that does not harm others, to

developing control of one's mind, to freeing the mind of defilements and generating love and good will. The practice is universally acceptable, and this is the most significant aspect of Dhamma, because whatever benefit one gets will be not from theories but from practice, from applying Dhamma in one's life.

In ten days, one can get only a rough outline of the technique; one cannot expect to become perfect in it so quickly. But even this brief experience should not be undervalued: you have taken the first step, a very important step, although the journey is long--indeed, it is a lifetime job.

A seed of Dhamma has been sown, and has started sprouting into a plant. A good gardener takes special care of a young plant, and because of the service given it, that little plant gradually grows into a huge tree with thick trunk and deep roots. Then, instead of requiring service, it keeps giving, serving, for the rest of its life.

This little plant of Dhamma requires service now. Protect it from the criticism of others by making a distinction between the theory, to which some might object, and the practice, which is acceptable to all. Don't allow such criticism to stop your practice. Meditate one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. This regular, daily practice is essential. At first it may seem a heavy burden to devote two hours a day to meditation, but you will soon find that much time will be saved that was wasted in the past. Firstly, you will need less time for sleep. Secondly, you will be able to complete your work more quickly, because your capacity for work will increase. When a problem arises you will remain balanced, and will be able immediately to find the correct solution. As you become established in the technique, you will find that having meditated in the morning, you are full of energy throughout the day, without any agitation.

When you go to bed at night, for five minutes be aware of sensations anywhere in the body before you fall asleep. Next morning, as soon as you wake up, again observe sensations within for five minutes. These few minutes of meditation immediately before falling asleep and after waking up will prove very helpful.

If you live in an area where there are other Vipassana meditators, once a week meditate together for an hour. And once a year, a ten-day retreat is a must. Daily practice will enable you to maintain what you have achieved here, but a retreat is essential in order to go deeper; there is still a long way to go. If you can come to an organized course like this, very good. If not, you can still have a retreat by yourself. Do a self-course for ten days, wherever you can be secluded from others, and where someone can prepare your meals for you. You know the technique, the timetable, the discipline; you have to impose all that on yourself now. If you wish to inform your teacher in advance that you are starting a self-course, I shall remember you and send my mettā, vibrations of good will; this will help to establish a healthy atmosphere in which you can work better. However, if you have not informed your teacher, you should not feel weak. Dhamma itself will protect you. Gradually you must reach a stage of self-dependence. The teacher is only a guide; you have to be your own master. Depending on anyone, all the time, is no liberation.

Daily meditation of two hours and yearly retreats of ten days are only the minimum necessary to maintain the practice. If you have more free time, you should use it for meditation. You may do short courses of a week, or a few days, even one day. In such short courses, devote the first one third of your time to the practice of Anapana, and the rest to Vipassana.

In your daily meditation, use most of the time for the practice of Vipassana. Only if your mind is agitated or dull, if for any reason it is difficult to observe sensations and maintain equanimity, then practice Anapana for as long as necessary.

When practicing Vipassana, be careful not to play the game of sensations, becoming elated with pleasant ones and depressed with unpleasant ones. Observe every sensation objectively. Keep moving your attention systematically throughout the body, not allowing it to remain on one part for long periods. A maximum of two minutes is enough in any part, or up to five minutes in rare cases, but never more than that. Keep the attention moving to maintain awareness of sensation in every part of the body. If the practice starts to become mechanical, change the way in which you move your attention. In every situation remain aware and equanimous, and you will experience the wonderful benefits of Vipassana.

In active life as well, you must apply the technique, not only when you sit with eyes closed. When you are working, all attention should be on your work; consider it as your meditation at this time. But if there is spare time, even for five or ten minutes, spend it in awareness of sensations; when you start work again, you will feel refreshed. Be careful, however, that when you meditate in public, in the presence of non-meditators, you keep your eyes open; never make a show of the practice of Dhamma.

If you practice Vipassana properly, a change must come for better in your life. You should check your progress on the path by checking your conduct in daily situations, in your behavior and dealings with other people. Instead of harming others, have you started helping them? When unwanted situations occur, do you

remain balanced? If negativity starts in the mind, how quickly are you aware of it? How quickly are you aware of the sensations that arise along with the negativity? How quickly do you start observing the sensations? How quickly do you regain a mental balance, and start generating love and compassion? In this way examine yourself, and keep progressing on the path.

Whatever you have attained here, not only preserve it, but make it grow. Keep applying Dhamma in your life. Enjoy all the benefits of this technique, and live a happy, peaceful, harmonious life, good for you and for all others.

One word of warning: you are welcome to tell others what you have learned here; there is never any secrecy in Dhamma. But at this stage, do not try to teach the technique. Before doing that, one must be ripened in the practice, and must be trained to teach. Otherwise, there is the danger of harming others instead of helping them. If someone you have told about Vipassana wishes to practice it, encourage that person to join an organized course like this, led by a proper guide. For now, keep working to establish yourself in Dhamma. Keep growing in Dhamma, and you will find that by the example of your life, you automatically attract others to the path.

May Dhamma spread around the world, for the good and benefit of many.

May all beings be happy, be peaceful, be liberated!