

Vipassana Discourse Day 3

The Noble Eightfold Path: paññā--received wisdom, intellectual wisdom, experiential wisdom--the kalāpa--the four elements--the three characteristics: impermanence, the illusory nature of the ego, suffering--penetrating through apparent reality.

The third day is over. Tomorrow afternoon you will enter the field of *paññā*, wisdom, the third division of the Noble Eightfold Path. Without wisdom, the path remains incomplete.

One begins the path by practicing *sīla*, that is, by abstaining from causing harm to others; but although one may not harm others, still one harms oneself by generating defilements in the mind. Therefore, one undertakes the training of *samādhi*, learning to control the mind, to suppress the defilements that have arisen.

However, suppressing defilements does not eliminate them. They remain in the unconscious and multiply there, continuing to cause harm to oneself. Therefore, the third step of Dhamma, *paññā*: neither giving a free license to the defilements nor suppressing them, but instead allowing them to arise and be eradicated. When the defilements are eradicated, the mind is freed from impurities. And when the mind has been purified, then without any effort one abstains from actions that harm others since by nature a pure mind is full of goodwill and compassion for others. Similarly, without any effort one

abstains from actions that harm oneself. One lives a happy, healthy life. Thus, each step of the path must lead to the next. *Sīla* leads to the development of *samādhi*, right concentration; *samādhi* leads to the developments of *paññā*, wisdom which purifies the mind; *paññā* leads to *nibbāna*, liberation from all impurities, full enlightenment.

Within the division of *paññā* fall two more parts of the Noble Eightfold Path:

(7) *Sammā-saṅkappa*--right thoughts. It is not necessary that the entire thought process be stopped before one can begin to develop wisdom. Thoughts remain, but the pattern of thinking changes. The defilements at the surface level of the mind start to pass away because of the practice of awareness of respiration. Instead of thoughts of craving, aversion, and delusion, one begins to have healthy thoughts, thoughts about Dhamma, the way to liberate oneself.

(8) *Sammā-diṭṭhi*--right understanding. This is real *paññā*, understanding reality as it is, not just as it appears to be.

There are three stages in the development of *paññā*, of wisdom. The first is *suta-mayā paññā*, wisdom acquired by hearing or reading the words of another. This received wisdom is very helpful in order to set one in the proper direction. However, by itself it cannot liberate, because in fact it is only a borrowed wisdom. One accepts it as true perhaps out of blind faith, or perhaps out of aversion, in

the fear that disbelieving will lead one to hell, or perhaps out of craving, in the hope that believing will lead one to heaven. But in any case, it is not one's own wisdom.

The function of received wisdom should be to lead to the next stage: *cintā-mayā paññā*, intellectual understanding. Rationally one examines what one has heard or read, to see whether it is logical, practical, beneficial; if so, then one accepts it. This rational understanding is also important, but it can be very dangerous if it is regarded as an end in itself. Someone develops his intellectual knowledge, and decides that therefore he is a very wise person. All that he learns serves only to inflate his ego; he is far away from liberation.

The proper function of intellectual understanding is to lead to the next stage; *bhāvanā-mayā paññā*, the wisdom that develops within oneself, at the experiential level. This is real wisdom. Received wisdom and intellectual understanding are very useful if they give one inspiration and guidance to take the next step. However, it is only experiential wisdom that can liberate, because this is one's own wisdom, based on one's own experience.

An example of the three types of wisdom: a doctor gives a prescription for medicine to a sick man. The man goes home, and out of great faith in his doctor, he recites the prescription every day; this is *suta-mayā paññā*. Not satisfied with that, the man returns to the doctor, and demands and receives an explanation of the prescription, why it is necessary and how it will work; this is *cintā-mayā*

paññā. Finally, the man takes the medicine; only then is his disease eradicated. The benefit comes only from the third step, the *bhāvanā-mayā paññā*.

You have come to this course to take the medicine yourself, to develop your own wisdom. To do so, you must understand truth at the experiential level. So much confusion exists because the way things appear to be is totally different from their real nature. To remove this confusion, you must develop experiential wisdom. And outside of the framework of the body, truth cannot be experienced; it can only be intellectualized. Therefore, you must develop the ability to experience truth within yourself, from the grossest to the subtlest levels, in order to emerge from all illusions, all bondages.

Everyone knows that the entire universe is constantly changing, but mere intellectual understanding of this reality will not help; one must experience it within oneself. Perhaps a traumatic event, such as the death of someone near or dear, forces one to face the hard fact of impermanence, and one starts to develop wisdom, to see the futility of striving after worldly goods and quarrelling with others. But soon the old habit of egotism reasserts itself, and the wisdom fades, because it was not based on direct, personal experience. One has not experienced the reality of impermanence within oneself.

Everything is ephemeral, arising and passing away every moment--*aniccā*; but the rapidity and continuity of the process create the illusion of permanence. The flame of a

candle and the light of an electric lamp are both changing constantly. If by one's senses one can detect the process of change, as is possible in the case of the candle flame, then one can emerge from the illusion. But when, as in the case of the electric light, the change is so rapid and continuous that one's senses cannot detect it, then the illusion is far more difficult to break. One may be able to detect the constant change in a flowing river, but how is one to understand that the man who bathes in that river is also changing every moment?

The only way to break the illusion is to learn to explore within oneself, and to experience the reality of one's own physical and mental structure. This is what Siddhattha Gotama did to become a Buddha. Leaving aside all preconceptions, he examined himself to discover the true nature of the physical and mental structure. Starting from the level of superficial, apparent reality, he penetrated to the subtlest level, and he found that the entire physical structure, the entire material world, is composed of subatomic particles, called in Pali *attha kalāpa*. And he discovered that each such particle consists of the, four elements--earth, water, fire, air--and their subsidiary characteristics. These particles, he found, are the basic building blocks of matter, and they are themselves constantly arising and passing away, with great rapidity--trillions of times within a second. In reality there is no solidity in the material world; it is nothing but combustion and vibrations.

Modern scientists have confirmed the findings of the Buddha, and have proved by experiment that the entire material universe is composed of subatomic particles which rapidly arise and pass away. However, these scientists have not become liberated from all misery, because their wisdom is only intellectual. Unlike the Buddha, they have not experienced truth directly, within themselves. When one experiences personally the reality of one's own impermanence, only then does one start to come out of misery.

As the understanding of *aniccā* develops within oneself, another aspect of wisdom arises: *anattā*, no "I", no "mine". Within the physical and mental structure, there is nothing that lasts more than a moment, nothing that one can identify as an unchanging self or soul. If something is indeed "mine", then one must be able to possess it, to control it, but in fact one has no mastery even over one's body: it keeps changing, decaying, regardless of one's wishes.

Then the third aspect of wisdom develops: *dukkha*, suffering. If one tries to possess and hold on to something that is changing beyond one's control, then one is bound to create misery for oneself. Commonly, one identifies suffering with unpleasant sensory experiences, but pleasant ones can equally be causes of misery, if one develops attachment to them, because they are equally impermanent. Attachment to what is ephemeral is certain to result in suffering.

When the understanding of *aniccā*, *anattā*, and *dukkha* is strong, this wisdom will manifest in one's daily life. Just as one has learned to penetrate beyond the apparent reality within, so in external circumstances one will be able to see the apparent truth, and also the ultimate truth. One comes out of illusions and lives a happy, healthy life.

Many illusions are created by apparent, consolidated, integrated reality--for example, the illusion of physical beauty. The body appears beautiful only when it is integrated. Any part of it, seen separately, is without attraction, without beauty-*asubha*. Physical beauty is superficial, apparent reality, not ultimate truth.

However, understanding the illusory nature of physical beauty will not lead to hatred of others. As wisdom arises, naturally the mind becomes balanced, detached, pure, full of good will towards all. Having experienced reality within oneself, one can come out of illusions, cravings, and aversions, and can live peacefully and happily.

Tomorrow afternoon, you will take your first steps in the field of *paññā* when you start to practice Vipassana. Do not expect that as soon as you begin you will see all the subatomic particles arising and passing away throughout the body. No, one begins with gross, apparent truth, and by remaining equanimous, gradually one penetrates to subtler truths, to the ultimate truths of mind, of matter, of the mental factors and finally to the ultimate truth which is beyond mind and matter.

To attain this goal, you must work yourself. Therefore, keep your *sīla* strong, because this is the base of your meditation, and keep practicing Anapana until 3 p.m. tomorrow; keep observing reality within the area of the nostrils. Keep sharpening your mind so that when you start Vipassana tomorrow, you can penetrate to the deeper levels and eradicate the impurities hidden there. Work patiently, persistently, continuously, for your own good, your own liberation.

May all of you be successful in taking the first steps on the path of liberation.

May all beings be happy!