

## Vipassana Discourse Day 4

The fourth day is a very important day. You have started taking dips in the Ganges of Dhamma within, exploring the truth about yourself at the level of bodily sensations. In the past, because of ignorance, these sensations were causes for the multiplication of your misery, but they can also be tools to eradicate misery. You have taken a first step on the path to liberation by learning to observe bodily sensations and to remain equanimous.

Some questions about the technique which are frequently asked:

*Why move the attention through the body in order, and why in this order?* Any order may be followed, but an order is necessary.

Otherwise, there is the danger of neglecting some parts of the body, and those parts will remain blind, blank. Sensations exist throughout the body, and in this technique, it is very important to develop the ability to experience them everywhere. For this purpose, moving in order is very helpful.

**If in a part of the body there is no sensation, you may keep your attention there for a minute. In reality there is sensation there, as in every particle of the body, but it is of such a subtle nature that your mind is not aware of it consciously, and therefore this area seems blind. Stay for a minute, observing calmly, quietly and equanimously. Don't develop craving for a sensation, or aversion towards the blindness. If you do so, you have lost the balance of your mind, and an unbalanced mind is very dull; it certainly cannot experience the more subtle sensations. But if the mind remains balanced, it becomes sharper and more sensitive, capable of detecting subtle sensations. Observe the area equanimously for about a minute, not more. If within a minute no sensation appears, then smilingly move further. Next round, again stay for a minute; sooner or later you will begin to**

experience sensations there and throughout the body. If you have stayed for a minute and still cannot feel a sensation, then try to feel the touch of your clothing if it is a covered area, or the touch of the atmosphere if it is uncovered. Begin with these superficial sensations, and gradually you will start to feel other ones as well.

*If the attention is fixed in one part of the body and a sensation starts in another, should one jump back or forward to observe this other sensation?* No; continue moving in order. Don't try to stop the sensations in other parts of the body--you cannot do so--but don't give them any importance. Observe each sensation only when you come to it, moving in order. Otherwise, you will jump from one place to another, missing many parts of the body, observing only gross sensations. **You have to train yourself to observe all the different sensations in every part of the body, gross or subtle, pleasant or unpleasant, distinct or feeble. Therefore, never allow the attention to jump from, place to place.**

*How much time should one take to pass the attention from head to feet?* This will vary according to the situation one faces. The instruction is to fix your attention in a certain area, and as soon as you feel a sensation, to move ahead. If the mind is sharp enough, it will be aware of sensation as soon as it comes to an area, and you can move ahead at once. If this situation occurs throughout the body, it may be possible to move from head to feet in about ten minutes, but it is not advisable to move more quickly at this stage. If the mind is dull, however, there may be many areas in which it is necessary to wait for up to a minute for a sensation to appear. In that case, it may take thirty minutes or an hour to move from head to feet. The time needed to make a round is not important. Just keep working patiently, persistently; you will certainly be successful.

*How big should the area be in which to fix the attention?* Take a section of the body about two or three inches wide; then move ahead another two or three inches, and so on. If the mind is dull, take larger areas, for example, the entire face, or the entire right upper arm; then gradually try to reduce the area of attention. Eventually you will be able to feel sensations in every particle of the body, but for now, an area of two or three inches is good enough.

*Should one feel sensations only on the surface of the body or also in the interior?* Sometimes a meditator feels sensations inside as soon as he starts Vipassana; sometimes at first, he feels sensations only on the surface. Either way is perfectly all right. If sensations appear only on the surface, observe them repeatedly until you feel sensation on every part of the surface of the body. Having experienced sensations everywhere on the surface, you will later start penetrating into the interior.

**Gradually the mind will develop the ability to feel sensations everywhere, both outside and inside, in every part of the physical structure. But to begin, superficial sensations are good enough.**

**The path leads through the entire sensory field, to the ultimate reality which is beyond sensory experience. If you keep purifying your mind with the help of sensations, then certainly you will reach the ultimate stage.**

**When one is ignorant, sensations are a means to multiply one's misery, because one reacts to them with craving or aversion. The problem actually arises, the tension originates, at the level of bodily sensations; therefore, this is the level at which one must work to solve the problem, to change the habit pattern of the mind. One must learn to be aware of all the different sensations without reacting to them, accepting their changing, impersonal nature. By doing so, one comes out of the habit of blind reaction, one liberates oneself from misery.**

*What is a sensation?* Anything that one feels at the physical level is a sensation--any natural, normal, ordinary bodily sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant, whether gross or subtle, whether intense or feeble. Never ignore a sensation on the grounds that it is caused by atmospheric conditions, or by sitting for long hours, or by an old disease. Whatever the reason, the fact is that you feel a sensation. Previously you tried to push out the unpleasant sensations, to pull in the pleasant ones. Now you simply observe objectively, without identifying with the sensations.

It is a choiceless observation. **Never try to select sensations; instead accept whatever arises naturally.** If you start looking for something in particular, something extraordinary, you will create difficulties for yourself, and will not be able to progress on the path. **The technique is not to experience something special, but rather to remain equanimous in the face of any sensation. In the past you had similar sensations in your body, but you were not aware of them consciously, and you reacted to them. Now you are learning to be aware and not to react, to feel whatever is happening at the physical level and to maintain equanimity.**

If you work in this way, gradually the entire law of nature will become clear to you. This is what **Dhamma** means: **nature, law, truth. To understand truth at the experiential level, one must investigate it within the framework of the body. This is what Siddhattha Gotama did to become a Buddha, and it became clear to him, and will become clear to anyone who works as he did, that throughout the universe, within the body as well as outside it, everything keeps changing. Nothing is a final product; everything is involved in the process of becoming--*bhava*. And another reality will become clear: nothing happens accidentally. Every change has a cause which produces an effect, and that effect in turn becomes the cause for a further change,**

**making an endless chain of cause and effect. And still another law will become clear: as the cause is, so the effect will be; as the seed is, so the fruit will be.**

On the same soil one sows two seeds, one of sugarcane, the other of *neem*--a very bitter tropical tree. From the seed of sugarcane develops a plant that is sweet in every fiber, from the seed of neem, a plant that is bitter in every fiber. One may ask why nature is kind to one plant and cruel to the other. In fact, nature is neither kind nor cruel; it works according to set rules. Nature merely helps the quality of each seed to manifest. If one sows seeds of sweetness, the harvest will be sweetness. If one sows seeds of bitterness, the harvest will be bitterness. As the seed is, so the fruit will be; as the action is, so the result will be.

The problem is that one is very alert at harvest time, wanting to receive sweet fruit, but during the sowing season one is very heedless, and plants seeds of bitterness. If one wants sweet fruit, one should plant the proper type of seeds. Praying or hoping for a miracle is merely self-deception; one must understand and live according to the law of nature. **One must be careful about one's actions (thoughts are actions), because these are the seeds in accordance with the quality of which one will receive sweetness or bitterness.**

There are three types of action: physical, vocal and mental. One who learns to observe oneself quickly realizes that **mental action is the most important, because this is the seed, the action that will give results.** Vocal and physical actions are merely projections of the mental action, yardsticks to measure its intensity. They originate as mental action, and this mental action subsequently manifests at the vocal or physical level. Hence the Buddha declared:

Mind precedes all phenomena,  
mind matters most, everything is mind-made.  
If with an impure mind  
you speak or act,  
then suffering follows you  
as the cartwheel follows the foot of the draft animal.

If with a pure mind  
you speak or act,  
then happiness follows you  
as a shadow that never departs.

If this is the case, then one must know what is the mind and how it works. You have started investigating this phenomenon by your practice. As you proceed, it will become clear that there are **four major segments or aggregates** of the mind.

The first segment is called *viññāṇa*, which may be translated as consciousness. The sense organs are lifeless unless consciousness comes into contact with them. For example, if one is engrossed in a vision, a sound may come and one will not hear it, because all one's consciousness is with the eyes. The function of this part of the mind is to cognize, simply to know, without differentiating. A sound comes into contact with the ear, and the *viññāṇa* (consciousness) notes only the fact that a sound has come.

Then the next part of the mind starts working: *saññā*, perception. A sound has come, and from one's past experience and memories, one recognizes it: a sound...words...words of praise... good; or else, a sound...words...words of abuse...bad. One gives an evaluation of good or bad, according to one's past experience.

At once the third part of the mind starts working: *vedanā*, sensation. As soon as a sound comes, there is a sensation on the body, but when the perception recognizes it and gives it a valuation, the sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant, in accordance with that valuation. For example: a sound has come...words...words of praise...good--and one feels a pleasant sensation throughout the body. Or else; a sound has come...words...words of abuse...bad--and one feels an unpleasant sensation throughout the body. Sensations arise on the body, and are felt by the mind; this is the function called *vedanā*.

Then the fourth part of the mind starts working: *saṅkhāra*, reaction. A sound has come...words...words of praise...good...pleasant sensation--and one starts liking it: "This praise is wonderful! I want more!" Or else: a sound has come...words...words of abuse...bad...unpleasant sensation--and one starts disliking it: "I can't bear this abuse, stop it!" At each of the sense doors, the same process occurs; eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body. Similarly, when a thought or imagination comes into contact with the mind, in the same way a sensation arises on the body, pleasant or unpleasant, and one starts reacting with liking or disliking. This momentary liking develops into great craving; this disliking develops into great aversion. One starts tying knots inside.

Here is the real seed that gives fruit, the action that will have results: the *saṅkhāra*, the mental reaction. Every moment one keeps sowing this seed, keeps reacting with liking or disliking, craving or aversion, and by doing so makes oneself miserable.

There are reactions that make a very light impression, and are eradicated almost immediately, those that make a slightly deeper impression and are eradicated after a little time, and those that make a very deep impression, and take a very long time to be eradicated. At the end of a day, if one tries to remember all the *saṅkhārā* that one

has generated, one will be able to recall only the one or two that made the deepest impression during that day. In the same way, at the end of a month or of a year, one will be able to recall only the one or two *saṅkhārā* that made the deepest impression during that time. And like it or not, at the end of life, whatever *saṅkhārā* has made the strongest impression is bound to come up in the mind; and the next life will begin with a mind of the same nature, having the same qualities of sweetness or bitterness. We create our own future, by our actions.

Vipassana teaches the art of dying: how to die peacefully, harmoniously. And one learns the art of dying by learning the art of living: how to become master of the present moment, how not to generate a *saṅkhārā* at this moment, how to live a happy life here and now. If the present is good, one need not worry about the future, which is merely a product of the present, and therefore bound to be good.

There are two aspects of the technique:

The first is breaking the barrier between the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind. Usually, the conscious mind knows nothing of what is being experienced by the unconscious. Hidden by this ignorance, reactions keep occurring at the unconscious level; by the time they reach the conscious level, they have become so intense that they easily overpower the mind. By this technique, the entire mass of the mind becomes conscious, aware; the ignorance is removed.

The second aspect of the technique is equanimity. One is aware of all that one experiences, of every sensation, but does not react, does not tie new knots of craving or aversion, does not create misery for oneself.



To begin, while you sit for meditation, most of the time you will react to the sensations, but a few moments will come when you remain equanimous, despite severe pain. Such moments are very powerful in changing the habit pattern of the mind. **Gradually you will reach the stage in which you can smile at any sensation, knowing it is *aniccā*, bound to pass away.**

**To achieve this stage, you have to work yourself, no-one else can work for you.** It is good that you have taken the first step on the path; now keep walking, step by step, towards your own liberation.

May all of you enjoy real happiness.

***May all beings be happy!***