

Vipassana Discourse Day 6

Importance of developing awareness and equanimity towards sensations--the four elements and their relation to sensations--the four causes of the arising of matter--the five hindrances: craving, aversion, mental and physical sluggishness, agitation, doubt

Six days are over; you have four more left to work. In four days, you can eradicate some of the mental defilements, and grasp the technique in order to make use of it throughout your life. If you work with proper understanding and learn how to apply the technique in daily life, then certainly it will be very beneficial for you. Therefore, understand the technique properly.

This is not a path of pessimism. Dhamma teaches us to accept the bitter truth of suffering, but it also shows the way out of suffering. For this reason, it is a path of optimism, combined with realism, and also "workism"--each person has to work to liberate himself or herself.

In a few words, the entire path was explained:

All saṅkhāra are impermanent. When one perceives this with true insight, then one becomes detached from suffering; this is the path of purification.

Here the word *saṅkhāra* means not only mental reactions, but also the results of these reactions. Every mental reaction is a seed which gives a fruit, and everything that one experiences in life is a fruit, a result of one's own actions, that is, one's *saṅkhāra*, past or present. Hence the meaning is, "Everything that arises, that

becomes composed, will pass away, will disintegrate". Merely accepting this reality emotionally, or out of devotion, or intellectually, will not purify the mind. It must be accepted at the actual level, by experiencing the process of arising and passing away within oneself. If one experiences impermanence directly by observing one's own physical sensations, then the understanding that develops is real wisdom, one's own wisdom. And with this wisdom one becomes freed from misery. Even if pain remains, one no longer suffers from it. Instead, one can smile at it, because one can observe it.

The old mental habit is to seek to push away painful sensations and to pull in pleasurable ones. So long as one is involved in the game of pain-and-pleasure, push-and-pull, the mind remains agitated, and one's misery increases. But once one learns to observe objectively without identifying with the sensations, then the process of purification starts, and the old habit of blind reaction and of multiplying one's misery is gradually weakened and broken. One must learn how to just observe.

This does not mean that by practicing Vipassana one becomes a "vegetable", passively allowing others to do one harm. Rather, one learns how to act instead of to react. Previously one lived a life of reaction, and reaction is always negative. Now you are learning how to live properly, to live a healthy life of real action. Whenever a difficult situation arises in life, one who has learned to observe sensations will not fall into blind reaction. Instead, he will wait a few moments, remaining aware of sensations and also equanimous, and then will make a decision and choose a course of action. Such an action is certain to be positive, because it proceeds from a balanced mind; it will be a creative action, helpful to oneself and others.

Gradually, as one learns to observe the phenomenon of mind and matter within, one comes out of reactions, because one comes out of ignorance. The habit pattern of reaction is based on ignorance. Someone who has never observed reality within does not know what is happening deep inside, does not know how he reacts with craving or aversion, generating tensions which make him miserable.

The difficulty is that mind is far more impermanent than matter. The mental processes occur so rapidly that one cannot follow them unless one has been trained to do so. Not knowing reality, one remains under the delusion that one reacts to external objects such as visions, sounds, tastes, etc. Apparently, this is so, but someone who learns to observe himself will find that at a subtler level the reality is different. The entire external universe exists for a person only when he or she experiences it, that is, when a sensory object comes into contact with one of the sense doors. As soon as there is a contact, there will be a vibration, a sensation. The perception gives a valuation to the sensation as good or bad, based on one's past experiences and conditionings, past *saṅkhārā*. In accordance with this coloured valuation the sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant, and according to the type of sensation, one starts reacting with liking or disliking, craving or aversion. Sensation is the forgotten missing link between the external object and the reaction. The entire process occurs so rapidly that one is unaware of it: by the time a reaction reaches the conscious level, it has been repeated and intensified trillions of times, and has become so strong that it can easily overpower the mind.

Siddhattha Gotama gained enlightenment by discovering the root cause of craving and aversion, and by eradicating them where they arise, at the level of sensation. What he himself had done; he

taught to others. He was not unique in teaching that one should come out of craving and aversion; even before him, this was taught in India. Neither is morality unique to the teaching of the Buddha, nor the development of control of one's mind. Similarly, wisdom at the intellectual, emotional, or devotional levels also existed before the Buddha. The unique element in his teaching lies elsewhere, in his identifying physical sensation as the crucial point at which craving and aversion begin, and at which they must be eliminated. Unless one deals with sensations, one will be working only at a superficial level of the mind, while in the depths the old habit of reaction will continue. By learning to be aware of all the sensations within oneself and to remain equanimous towards them, one stops reactions where they start: one comes out of misery.

This is not a dogma to be accepted on faith, nor a philosophy to be accepted intellectually. You have to investigate yourself to discover the truth. Accept it as true only when you experience it. Hearing about truth is important, but it must lead to actual practice. All the teachings of the Buddha must be practiced and experienced for oneself so that one may come out of misery.

The entire structure of the body, the Buddha explained, is composed of subatomic particles--*kalāpa*--consisting of the four elements and their subsidiary characteristics, joined together. In the world outside as well as within, it is easy to see that some matter is solid--earth element; some is liquid--water element; some is gaseous--air element; and in every case, temperature is present--fire element. However, someone who examines reality within himself will understand the four elements at a subtler level. The entire range of weight from heaviness to lightness, is the field of earth element. Fire element is the field of temperature, from extreme cold to extreme heat. Air element has to do with motion,

from a seemingly stationary state to the greatest movement. Water element concerns the quality of cohesiveness, of binding together. Particles arise with a predominance of one or more elements; the others remain latent. In turn, a sensation manifests in accordance with the quality of the element that is predominant in those particles. If *kalāpa* arise with a predominance of fire element, a sensation occurs of heat or cold, and similarly for the other elements. This is how all sensations arise within the physical structure. If one is ignorant, one gives valuations and reacts to the sensations, generating new misery for oneself. But if wisdom arises, one simply, understands that subatomic particles are arising with a predominance of one or another element, and that these are all impersonal, changing phenomena, arising to pass away. With this understanding, one does not lose the balance of one's mind when facing any sensation.

As one continues observing oneself, it becomes clear why *kalāpa* arise: they are produced by the input that one gives to the life flow, the flow of matter and mind. The flow of matter requires material input, of which there are two types: the food one eats and the atmosphere in which one lives. The flow of mind requires mental input, which again is of two types: either a present or a past *sañkhārā*. If one gives an input of anger at the present moment, immediately mind influences matter, and *kalāpa* will start to arise with a predominance of fire element, causing one to feel a sensation of heat. If the input is fear, the *kalāpa* generated at that time will have a predominance of air element, and one feels a sensation of trembling; and so on. The second type of mental input is a past *sañkhārā*. Every *sañkhārā* is a seed which gives a fruit, a result after some time. Whatever sensation one experienced when planting the seed, the same sensation will arise when the fruit of that *sañkhārā* comes to the surface of the mind.

Of these four causes, one should not try to determine which is responsible for the arising of a particular sensation. One should merely accept whatever sensation occurs. The only effort should be to observe without generating a new *saṅkhārā*. If one does not give the input of a new reaction to the mind, automatically an old reaction will give its fruit, manifesting as sensation. One observes, and it passes away. Again one does not react; therefore another old *saṅkhārā* must give its fruit. In this way, by remaining aware and equanimous, one allows the old *saṅkhārā* to arise and pass away, one after another: one comes out of misery.

The old habit of generating new reactions must be eliminated, and it can only be done gradually, by repeated practice, by continued work.

Of course there are hindrances, obstacles on the way: five strong enemies which try to overpower you and stop your progress. The first two enemies are craving and aversion. The purpose of practicing Vipassana is to eliminate these two basic mental defilements, yet they may arise even while you meditate, and if they overwhelm the mind, the process of purification stops. You may crave for subtle sensations, or even for *nibbāna*; it makes no difference. Craving is a fire that burns, no matter what the fuel; it takes you in the opposite direction from liberation. Similarly, you may start generating aversion towards the pain that you experience, and again you are off the track.

Another enemy is laziness, drowsiness. All night you slept soundly, and yet when you sit to meditate, you feel very sleepy. This sleepiness is caused by your mental impurities, which would be driven out by the practice of Vipassana, and which therefore try to stop you from meditating. You must fight to prevent this enemy from

overpowering you. Breathe slightly hard, or else get up, sprinkle cold water on your eyes, or walk a little, and then sit again.

Alternatively, you may feel great agitation, another way in which the impurities try to stop you from practicing Vipassana. All day you run here and there, doing anything except meditation. Afterwards, you realize that you have wasted time, and start crying and repenting. But on the path of Dhamma there is no place for crying. If you make a mistake, then you should accept it in front of an elder in whom you have confidence, and resolve to be careful not to repeat the mistake in future.

Finally, a great enemy is doubt, either about the teacher, or about the technique, or about one's ability to practice it. Blind acceptance is not beneficial, but neither is endless unreasoning doubt. So long as you remain immersed in doubts, you cannot take even one step on the path. If there is anything that is not clear to you, do not hesitate to come to your guide. Discuss the matter with him, and understand it properly. If you practice as you are asked to, the results are bound to come.

The technique works, not by any magic or miracle, but by the law of nature. Anyone who starts working in accordance with natural law is bound to come out of misery; this is the greatest possible miracle.

Large numbers of people have experienced the benefits of this technique, not only those who came to the Buddha himself, but also many in later ages, and in the present age. If one practices properly, making efforts to remain aware and equanimous, then layers of past impurities are bound to rise to the surface of the mind, and to pass away. Dhamma gives wonderful results here and now,

provided one works. Therefore, work with full confidence and understanding. Make best use of this opportunity in order to come out of all misery, and to enjoy real peace.

May all of you enjoy real happiness.

May all beings be happy!