

Vipassana Discourse Day 7

Importance of equanimity towards subtle as well as gross sensations--continuity of awareness--the five friends--faith, effort, awareness, concentration, wisdom

Seven days are over: you have three more left to work. Make best use of these days by working hard and continuously, understanding how you ought to practice.

There are two aspects of the technique: awareness and equanimity. One must develop awareness of all the sensations that occur within the framework of the body, and at the same time one must remain equanimous towards them. By remaining equanimous, naturally one will find, sooner or later, that sensations start to appear in areas that were blind, and that the gross, solidified, unpleasant sensations begin to dissolve into subtle vibrations. One starts to experience a very pleasant flow of energy throughout the body.

The danger when this situation arises is that one takes this pleasurable sensory experience as the goal towards which one was working. In fact, the purpose of practicing Vipassana is not to experience a certain type of sensation, but rather to develop equanimity towards all sensations. Sensations keep changing, whether gross or subtle. One's progress on the path can be measured only by the equanimity one develops towards every sensation.

Even after one has experienced a free flow of subtle vibrations throughout the body, it is quite possible that again a gross sensation may arise somewhere, or a blind area. These are signs not of regression but of progress. As one develops in awareness

and equanimity, naturally one penetrates deeper into the unconscious mind, and uncovers impurities hidden there. So long as these deep-lying complexes remain in the unconscious, they are bound to bring misery in the future. The only way to eliminate them is to allow them to come up to the surface of the mind and pass away. When such deep-rooted *saṅkhārā* arise on the surface, many of them may be accompanied by unpleasant, gross sensations or blind areas within the body. If one continues to observe without reacting, the sensation passes away, and with it the *saṅkhārā* of which it is a manifestation.

Every sensation, whether gross or subtle has the same characteristic of impermanence. A gross sensation arises, seems to stay for some time, but sooner or later passes away. A subtle sensation arises and passes away with great rapidity, but still, it has the same characteristic. No sensation is eternal. Therefore, one should not have preferences or prejudices towards any sensation. When a gross, unpleasant sensation arises, one observes it without becoming depressed. When a subtle, pleasant sensation arises, one accepts it, even enjoys it, without becoming elated or attached to it. In every case one understands the impermanent nature of all sensations; then one can smile when they arise and when they pass away.

Equanimity must be practiced at the level of bodily sensation in order to make a real change in one's life. At every moment sensations are arising within the body. Usually, the conscious mind is unaware of them, but the unconscious mind feels the sensations and reacts to them with craving or aversion. If the mind is trained to become fully conscious of all that occurs within the physical structure and at the same time to maintain equanimity, then the old habit of blind reaction is broken. One learns how to remain

equanimous in every situation, and can therefore live a balanced, happy life.

You are here to experience the truth about yourself, how this phenomenon works, how it generates misery. There are two aspects of the human phenomenon: material and mental, body and mind. One must observe both. But one cannot actually experience the body without awareness of what arises in the body, that is, sensation. Similarly, one cannot observe mind separately from what arises in the mind, that is, thought. As one goes deeper in experiencing the truth of mind and matter, it becomes clear that whatever arises in the mind is also accompanied by a physical sensation. Sensation is of central importance for experiencing the reality of both body and mind, and it is the point at which reactions start. In order to observe the truth of oneself and to stop generating mental defilements, one must be aware of sensations and remain equanimous as continuously as possible.

For this reason, in the remaining days of the course, you must work continuously with closed eyes during meditation hours; but during recess periods as well, you must try to maintain awareness and equanimity at the level of sensations. Perform whatever action you must do in the usual way, whether walking, eating, drinking, or bathing; don't slow the action down. Be aware of the physical movement of the body, and at the same time of the sensations, if possible, in the part of the body that is in motion, or else in any other part. Remain aware and equanimous.

Similarly, when you go to bed at night, close your eyes and feel sensation anywhere within the body. If you fall asleep with this awareness, naturally as soon as you wake up in the morning, you will be aware of sensation. Perhaps you may not sleep soundly, or

you may even remain fully awake throughout the night. This is wonderful, provided you stay lying in bed and maintain awareness and equanimity. The body will receive the rest it needs, and there is no greater rest for the mind than to remain aware and equanimous. However, if you start worrying that you are developing insomnia, then you will generate tensions, and will feel, exhausted the next day. Nor should you forcefully try to stay awake, remaining in a seated posture all night; that would be going to an extreme. If sleep comes, very good; sleep. If sleep does not come, allow the body to rest by remaining in a recumbent position, and allow the mind to rest by remaining aware and equanimous.

The Buddha said, "When a meditator practices ardently, without neglecting for a moment awareness and equanimity towards sensations, such a person develops real wisdom, understanding sensations completely." The meditator understands how one who lacks wisdom reacts to sensations, and multiplies his misery. The meditator also understands how one who bears in mind the impermanent nature of all sensations will not react to them, and will come out of misery. The Buddha continued, "With this thorough understanding, the meditator is able to experience the stage beyond mind and matter--*nibbāna*." One cannot experience *nibbāna* until the heaviest *saṅkhārā* have been eliminated--those that would lead to a future life in a lower form of existence where misery would predominate. Fortunately, when one starts to practice Vipassana, it is these very *saṅkhārā* that arise first. One remains equanimous and they pass away. When all such *saṅkhārā* have been eradicated, then naturally one experiences *nibbāna* for the first time. Having experienced it, one is totally changed, and can no longer perform any action that would lead to a future life in a lower form of existence. Gradually one proceeds to higher stages, until all the *saṅkhārā* have been

eradicated that would have led to future life anywhere within the conditioned world. Such a person is fully liberated and therefore, the Buddha concluded, "Comprehending the entire truth of mind and matter, when he dies, he passes beyond the conditioned world, because he has understood sensations perfectly".

You have made a small beginning on this path by practicing to develop awareness of sensations throughout the body. If you are careful not to react to them, you will find that layer by layer, the old *saṅkhārā* are eradicated. By remaining equanimous towards gross, unpleasant sensations, you will proceed to experience subtler, pleasant sensations. If you continue to maintain equanimity, sooner or later you will reach the stage described by the Buddha, in which throughout the physical structure, the meditator experiences nothing but arising and passing away. All the gross, solidified sensations have dissolved; throughout the body there is nothing but subtle vibrations. Naturally this stage is very blissful, but still it is not the final goal, and one must not become attached to it. Some of the gross impurities have been eradicated, but others still remain in the depth of the mind. If one continues to observe equanimously, one after another all the deeper *saṅkhārā* will arise and pass away. When they are all eradicated, then one experiences the "deathless"--something beyond mind and matter, where nothing arises, and therefore nothing passes away--the indescribable stage of *nibbāna*.

Everyone who works properly to develop awareness and equanimity will certainly reach this stage; but each person must work himself or herself.

Just as there are five enemies, five hindrances which block your progress on the path, there are also five friends, five wholesome

faculties of the mind, which help and support you. If you keep these friends strong and pure, no enemy can overpower you.

The first friend is faith, devotion, confidence. Without confidence one cannot work, being always agitated by doubts and skepticism. However, if faith is blind, it is a great enemy. It becomes blind if one loses discriminatory intelligence, the proper understanding of what right devotion is. One may have faith in any deity or saintly person, but if it is right faith, with proper understanding, one will remember the good qualities of that person, and will gain inspiration to develop those qualities in oneself. Such devotion is meaningful and helpful. But if one does not try to develop the qualities of the person towards whom one has devotion, it is blind faith, which is very harmful.

For example, when one takes refuge in the Buddha, one must remember the qualities of a Buddha, and must work to develop those qualities in oneself. The essential quality of a Buddha is enlightenment; therefore, the refuge is actually in enlightenment, the enlightenment that one develops in oneself. One pays respect to anyone who has reached the stage of full enlightenment; that is, one gives importance to the quality wherever it may manifest, without being bound to a particular sect or person. And one honours the Buddha not by rituals or ceremonies, but by practicing his teachings, by walking on the path of Dhamma from the first step, *sīla*, to *samādhi*, to *paññā*, to *nibbāna*, liberation.

Anyone who is a Buddha must have the following qualities. He has eradicated all craving, aversion, ignorance. He has conquered all his enemies, the enemies within, that is, the mental impurities. He is perfect not only in the theory of Dhamma, but also in its application. What he practices, he preaches, and what he

preaches, he practices; there is no gap between his words and his deeds. Every step that he takes is a right step, leading in the right direction. He has learned everything about the entire universe, by exploring the universe within. He is overflowing with love, compassion, sympathetic joy for others, and keeps helping those who are going astray to find the right path. He is full of perfect equanimity. If one works to develop these qualities in oneself in order to reach the final goal, there is meaning in one's taking refuge in the Buddha.

Similarly, taking refuge in Dhamma has nothing to do with sectarianism; it is not a matter of being converted from one organized religion to another. Taking refuge in Dhamma is actually taking refuge in morality, in mastery over one's own mind, in wisdom. For a teaching to be Dhamma, it must also have certain qualities. Firstly, it must be clearly explained, so that anyone can understand it. It is to be seen for oneself before one's very eyes, the reality experienced by oneself, not an imagination. Even the truth of *nibbāna* is not to be accepted until one has experienced it. Dhamma must give beneficial results here and now, not merely promise benefits to be enjoyed in future. It has the quality of "come-and-see"; see for yourself, try it yourself, don't accept it blindly. And once one has tried it and experienced its benefits, one cannot resist encouraging and helping others to come and see as well. Every step on the path leads nearer to the final goal; no effort goes to waste. Dhamma is beneficial at the beginning, in the middle, at the end. Finally, any person of average intelligence, of whatever background, can practice it and experience the benefits. With this understanding of what it actually is, if one takes refuge in Dhamma and starts practicing it, one's devotion has real meaning.

In the same way, taking refuge in Sangha is not a matter of getting involved with a sect. Anyone who has walked on the path of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* and who has reached at least the first stage of liberation, who has become a saintly person, is a Sangha. He or she may be anyone, of any appearance, any colour, any background; it makes no difference. If one is inspired by seeing such a person and works to reach the same goal oneself, then one's taking refuge in Sangha is meaningful, right devotion.

Another friend is effort. Like faith, it must not be blind. Otherwise, there is the danger that one will work in a wrong way, and will not get the expected results. Effort must be accompanied by proper understanding of how one is to work; then it will be very helpful for one's progress.

Another friend is awareness. Awareness can only be of the reality of the present moment. One cannot be aware of the past; one can only remember it. One cannot be aware of the future; one can only have aspirations for or fears of the future. One must develop the ability to be aware of the reality that manifests within oneself at the present moment.

The next friend is concentration, sustaining the awareness of reality from moment to moment, without any break. It must be free from all imaginations, all cravings, all aversion; only then is it right concentration.

And the fifth friend is wisdom-not the wisdom acquired by listening to discourses, or reading books, or intellectual analysis; one must develop wisdom within oneself at the experiential level, because only by this experiential wisdom can one become liberated. And to be real wisdom, it must be based on physical sensations: one

remains equanimous towards sensations, understanding their impermanent nature. This is equanimity at the depths of the mind, which will enable one to remain balanced amid all the vicissitudes of daily life.

All the practice of Vipassana has as its purpose to enable one to live in a proper way, fulfilling one's worldly responsibilities while maintaining a balanced mind, remaining peaceful and happy within oneself and making others peaceful and happy. If you keep the five friends strong, you will become perfect in the art of living, and will lead a happy, healthy, good life.

Progress on the path of Dhamma, for the good and benefit of yourself and of so many.

May all suffering beings come into contact with pure Dhamma, to emerge from their misery and to enjoy real happiness.

May all beings be happy!