

Vipassana Discourse Day 9

Application of the technique in daily life--the ten parami

Nine days are over. Now is the time to discuss how to make use of this technique in daily life. This is of the utmost importance. Dhamma is an art of living. If you cannot use it in daily life, then coming to a course is no better than performing a ritual or ceremony.

Everyone faces unwanted situations in life. Whenever something unwanted happens, one loses the balance of one's mind, and starts generating negativity. And whenever a negativity arises in the mind, one becomes miserable. How is one not to generate negativity, not to create tension? How is one to remain peaceful and harmonious?

Sages who started exploring the reality of mind and matter within found a solution to the problem: whenever a negativity arises in the mind for whatever reason, one should divert one's attention elsewhere. For example, one might get up, drink some water, start counting, or start reciting the name of a deity or saintly person towards whom one has devotion. By diverting the attention, one will emerge from the negativity.

A workable solution. But other explorers of inner truth went to the deepest level of reality, to ultimate truth. These enlightened persons realized that by diverting the attention one creates a layer of peace and harmony at the conscious level, but one has not eliminated the negativity that has arisen. One has merely suppressed it. At the unconscious level, it continues to multiply and gather strength. Sooner or later, this sleeping volcano of negativity will erupt and overpower the mind. So long as negativities remain,

even at the unconscious level, the solution is only partial, temporary.

A fully enlightened person finds a real solution: don't run away from the problem; face it. Observe whatever impurity arises in the mind. By observing one does not suppress it, nor does one give it a free licence to express itself in harmful vocal or physical action. Between these two extremes lies the middle path: mere observation. When one starts to observe it, the negativity loses its strength and passes away without overpowering the mind. Not only that, but some of the old stock of that type of impurity will also be eradicated. Whenever a defilement starts at the conscious level, one's old stock of that type of defilement arises from the unconscious, becomes connected with the present defilement, and starts multiplying. If one just observes, not only the present impurity but also some portion of the old stock will be eradicated. In this way, gradually all the defilements are eradicated, and one becomes free from misery.

But for an average person, it is not easy to observe a mental defilement. One does not, know when it has started and how it has overpowered the mind. By the time it reaches the conscious level, it is far too strong to observe without reacting. Even if one tries to do so, it is very difficult to observe an abstract defilement of the mind--abstract anger, fear, or passion, Instead, one's attention is drawn to the external stimulus of the defilement, which will only cause it to multiply.

However, enlightened persons discovered that whenever a defilement arises in the mind, simultaneously two things start happening at the physical level: respiration will become abnormal, and a biochemical reaction will start within the body, a sensation.

A practical solution was found. It is very difficult to observe abstract defilements, in the mind, but with training one can soon learn to observe respiration and sensation, both of which are physical manifestations of the defilements. By observing a defilement in its physical aspect, one allows it to arise and pass away without causing any harm. One becomes free from the defilement.

It takes time to master this technique, but as one practices, gradually one will find that in more and more external situations in which previously one would have reacted with negativity, now one can remain balanced. Even if one does react, the reaction will not be so intense or prolonged as it would have been in the past. A time will come when in the most provoking situation, one will be able to heed the warning given by respiration and sensation, and will start observing them, even for a few moments. These few moments of self-observation will act as a shock absorber between the external stimulus and one's response. Instead of reacting blindly, the mind remains balanced, and one is capable of taking positive action that is helpful to oneself and others.

You have taken a first step towards eradicating your defilements and changing the habit pattern of the mind, by observing sensations within yourself.

From the time of birth, one is trained always to look outside. One never observes oneself, and therefore one is incapable of going to the depths of one's problems. Instead, one looks for the cause of one's misery outside, always blaming others for one's unhappiness. One sees things from only one angle, a partial view, which is bound to be distorted; and yet one accepts this view as the full truth. Any decision made with this incomplete information will only be harmful to oneself and others. In order to see the totality

of the truth, one must view it from more than one angle. This is what one learns to do by the practice of Vipassana: to see reality not only outside but inside as well.

Seeing from only one angle, one imagines that one's suffering is caused by other people, by an external situation. Therefore one devotes all one's energy to changing others, to changing the external situation. In fact, this is a wasted effort. One who has learned to observe reality within soon realizes, that he is completely responsible for his misery or happiness. For example, someone is abused by another person, and becomes unhappy. He blames the person who abused him for making him unhappy. Actually, the abuser created misery for himself, by defiling his own mind. The person who was abused created his own misery when he reacted to the abuse, when he started defiling *his* mind. Everyone is responsible for his or her own suffering, no-one else. When one experiences this truth, the madness of finding fault with others goes away.

What does one react to? An image created by oneself, not the external reality. When one sees someone, one's image of that person is coloured by one's past conditionings. The old *saṅkhārā* influence one's perception of any new situation. In turn, because of this conditioned perception, bodily sensation becomes pleasant or unpleasant. And according to the type of sensation, one generates a new reaction. Each of these processes is conditioned by the old *saṅkhārā*. But if one remains aware and equanimous towards sensations, the habit of blind reaction becomes weaker, and one learns to see reality as it is.

When one develops the ability to see things from different angles, then whenever another abuses or otherwise misbehaves, the

understanding arises that this person is misbehaving because he is suffering. With this understanding, one cannot react with negativity, but will feel only love and compassion for the suffering person, as a mother would feel for a sick child. The volition arises to help the person come out of his misery. Thus, one remains peaceful and happy, and helps others also to become peaceful and happy. This is the purpose of Dhamma: to practice the art of living, that is, to eradicate mental impurities and to develop good qualities, for one's own good and for the good of others.

There are ten good mental qualities--*parami*--that one must perfect to reach the final goal. The goal is the stage of total egolessness. These ten *parami* are qualities that gradually dissolve the ego, thereby bringing one closer to liberation. One has the opportunity to develop all ten of these qualities in a Vipassana course.

The first *parami* is *nekkhamma*--renunciation. One who becomes a monk or a nun renounces the householder's life and lives without personal possessions, even having to beg for his or her daily food. All this is done for the purpose of dissolving the ego. How can a lay person develop this quality? In a course like this, one has the opportunity to do so, since here one lives on the charity of others. Accepting whatever is offered as food, accommodation, or other facilities, one gradually develops the quality of renunciation. Whatever one receives here, one makes best use of it, working hard to purify the mind not only for one's own good, but also for the good of the unknown person who donated on one's behalf.

The next *parami* is *sīla*--morality. One tries to develop this *parami* by following the five precepts at all times, both during a course and in daily life. There are many obstacles which make it difficult to practice *sīla* in worldly life. However, here in a meditation course,

there is no opportunity to break the precepts, because of the heavy program and discipline. Only in speaking is there any likelihood of one's deviating from strict observance of morality. For this reason, one takes a vow of silence for the first nine days of the course. In this way, at least within the period of the course, one keeps *sīla* perfectly.

Another *parami* is *vīriya*--effort. In daily life one makes efforts, for example to earn one's livelihood. Here, however, the effort is to purify the mind by remaining aware and equanimous. This is right effort, which leads to liberation.

Another *parami* is *paññā*--wisdom. In the outside world, one may have wisdom, but it is the wisdom one gains from reading books or listening to others, or merely intellectual understanding. The real *parami* of wisdom is the understanding that develops within oneself, by one's own experience in meditation. One realizes directly by self-observation the facts of impermanence, suffering, and egolessness. By this direct experience of reality, one comes out of suffering.

Another *parami* is *khantī*--tolerance. At course like this, working and living together in a group, one may find oneself becoming disturbed and irritated by the actions of another person. But soon one realizes that the person causing a disturbance is ignorant of what he is doing, or a sick person. The irritation goes away, and one feels only love and compassion for that person. One has started developing the quality of tolerance.

Another *parami* is *sacca*--truth. By practicing *sacca* one undertakes to maintain truthfulness at the vocal level. However, *sacca* must also be practiced in a deeper sense. Every

step on the path must be a step with truth, from gross, apparent truth, to subtler truths, to ultimate truth. There is no room for imagination. One must always remain with the reality that one actually experiences at the present moment.

Another *parami* is *adhiṭṭhāna*--strong determination. When one starts a Vipassana course, one makes a determination to remain for the entire period of the course. One resolves to follow the precepts, the rule of silence, all the discipline of the course. After the introduction of the technique of Vipassana itself, one makes a strong determination to meditate for the entire hour during each group sitting without opening eyes, hands or legs. At a later stage on the path, this *parami* will be very important; when coming close to the final goal, one must be ready to sit without break until reaching liberation. For this purpose it is necessary to develop strong determination.

Another *parami* is *mettā*--pure, selfless love. In the past one tried to feel love and goodwill for others, but this was only at the conscious level of the mind. At the unconscious level the old tensions continued. When the entire mind is purified, then from the depths one can wish for the happiness of others. This is real love, which helps others and helps oneself as well.

Yet another *parami* is *upekkhā*--equanimity. One learns to keep the balance of the mind not only when experiencing gross, unpleasant sensations or blind areas in the body, but also in the face of subtle, pleasant, sensations. In every situation one understands that the experience of that moment is impermanent, bound to pass away. With this understanding one remains detached, equanimous.

The last *parami* is *dāna*--charity, donation. For a lay person, this is the first essential step of Dhamma. A lay person has the responsibility of earning money by right livelihood, for the support of oneself and of any dependents. But if one generates attachment to the money that one earns, then one develops ego. For this reason, a portion of what one earns must be given for the good of others. If one does this, ego will not develop, since one understands that one earns for one's own benefit and also for the benefit of others. The volition arises to help others in whatever way one can. And one realizes that there can be no greater help to others than to help them learn the way out of suffering.

In a course like this, one has a wonderful opportunity to develop this *parami*. Whatever one receives here is donated by another person; there are no charges for room and board, and certainly none for the teaching. In turn, one is able to give a donation for the benefit of someone else. The amount one gives will vary according to one's means. Naturally a wealthy person will wish to give more, but even the smallest donation, given with proper volition, is very valuable in developing this *parami*. Without expecting anything in return, one gives so that others may experience the benefits of Dhamma and may come out of their suffering.

Here you have the opportunity to develop all ten of the *parami*. When all these good qualities are perfected, you will reach the final goal.

Keep practicing to develop them little by little. Keep progressing on the path of Dhamma, not only for your own benefit and liberation, but also for the benefit and liberation of many.

May all suffering beings find pure Dhamma, and be liberated.

May all beings be happy!