

MEDITATION BEYOND ALL CONCEPTS

(TRANSLATION BY PRIYANTHA MEDAWATTA OF A TALK
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I would like to speak about some aspects of meditation according to my own experience and the experiences of other meditators.

We all know that meditation is connected with our minds. If you are aware of your mind, the way it works, and of your thoughts, what can you learn? I would like you to reflect on your own experiences. When you observe your thoughts, what can you learn from them? You will be able to discover one thing: the endless chatter of the mind, sometimes we can't even identify what kind of thoughts are passing through our minds. Or after experiencing a stream of thoughts you will realise that you are hardly in the present moment.

You will be able to discover something else about this inner chatter: that from the time we wake up until the time we go to sleep, we never experience a break from this inner chatter. Even while we are eating, dressing or bathing there's no end to this inner chatter. Even at this moment, if you focus your attention on your mind you will experience the same thing.

If you can try to find out about your dreams, you will realise that there is a close connection between our dreams and this chattering mind. It shows that whether we are awake or asleep the mind continues to work. That may be the reason why we can feel tired even after a long sleep.

Another important thing we have to understand is the way we act mechanically most of the time – just like robots! And we can also observe how emotions such as fear, unhappiness and jealousy can affect our minds. This gives us a very good opportunity to find out whether we control these emotions or whether they control us.

So when we realise the real condition of our minds, what should we do in order to make a change in our minds? There needs to be a change in this uncontrollable, confused mind. In order to achieve this change what should we do? We should understand the mind, that it needs to be controlled, the speed of the mind needs to be slowed down. At the beginning we need a different environment for this, and various meditation techniques.

So I would like to introduce you to a commonly used form of meditation – being aware of your breath. When you practice this you will learn so many things, and the speed of the mind will slow down. For the first time in our life we try to bring our awareness to the mechanical breathing process. So this consciousness, this awareness, is a very important aspect of meditation.

You will realise another thing: the way we create our own suffering. You will realise how the past and the future influence you and cause you to create suffering for yourselves. You will see how thoughts which you have repressed in your mind sometimes surface when you are open to what is happening in your mind. When you continuously practice this openness

you will come to a point where you experience the lightness, the joy, and the awakening of your mind.

I would like to raise a question at this point. We have so many problems in our homes, in the places where we work, the problems of our children, the economic problems, the social problems, and the problems created due to various other reasons. At the same time our minds are affected by all the things we hear, we read, and we see on television and so on. In our everyday surroundings we have all these experiences to contest with. So my question is, although we are able to practice in a very calm and quiet way in an artificial setting like a meditation centre, how can we maintain this calmness in the ordinary environments we meet in our day-to-day life? If there were a form of practice which gave you a better way to solve these problems how valuable that would be!

So if as a result of meditation you can make your mind quiet, and if you can experience a deep calmness within you, then there will be a possibility for you to look at these problems in an equanimous way. And if there were a chance for you to observe your own mind, then you will be able to find the root cause within yourself for the problems you face. Instead, most of the time we try to find the answers outside ourselves.

There are people who suffer due to fear. They are afraid of their defilements, they see them as 'monsters'. As meditators they have the chance to explore their monsters rather than to be afraid of them. Through that exploration they have a chance to make a big change in their lives.

In one of the talks this morning a very important point was made. It was about death: "For a person who is friendly with death, death is not a problem". In the same way, can't we be friendly towards our monsters? Our attitude towards our defilements is wrong. We see them, as enemies, we are angry with them and we hate them. That shows us that we have an attachment, so we fight with them. We are expecting a mind without defilements, which is not realistic. We don't like to accept the mind as it really is.

There are people who are so concerned about their monsters I feel very sorry for them, because they have forgotten the times when they are free from their monsters. If you are really mindful you have a chance to identify the instances when you experience the monsters in your mind, and the instances when you are free of them. Then all these problems are over.

Another point I'd like to highlight is this sense of ownership. This concept is with us from our very young days. That's why we say: "This is my mother; this is my name; this is my body" etc. We have forgotten that this is just a concept.

Thereby we create so many problems. We form an idea of "what should be" and "what should not be" towards what we possess. So when we see our body grow old, when it gets sick, or when the body dies, we suffer due to the concept "it should not be so". This is common with external things also. We have created this sense of ownership towards other people: we say "he is my husband" or "she is my wife". So when they grow old, when they get sick or when they change the same suffering comes again, the dissatisfaction comes again.

Due to this concept of ownership we create very absurd problems. I remember in one of the talks this morning some ideas were voiced concerning the caste problem. We have formed

the idea that we belong to a high caste and some others belong to a lower caste, etc. Don't you have this concept in your mind? Then if you see that your child gets married to a person who is said to belong to a lower caste, how do you feel? What would be your reaction? In these instances we forget what the Lord Buddha has preached about caste in Vasala Sutta. See how powerful this sense of ownership is! We forget that we are all individuals. We may argue that this is my family, this is my caste, and we reject other families, other castes. I remember one person who was very well educated. He had a very good knowledge of the Dhamma, philosophy and psychology. But he killed himself because his daughter got married to a person who was said to belong to a lower caste.

Don't we have this sense of ownership in the area of ethnicity too? It is also creating a division. Isn't this the reason for the condition of our country today?

One day when I was watching television there was a news item about the killing of a young person who belonged to a terrorist group. I felt some sense of approval in my mind concerning this killing. As a meditator, I reflected on my mind to find a reason for this. I realised that another incident was influencing me in this feeling of approval. There had been a bomb-blast in a major city in Sri Lanka. Due to this some Sinhalese people had died and others had been injured. This bomb-blast had been caused by a group of people of the same organisation to which this young person belonged. So as a Sinhalese I had formed the idea that it is okay to kill those people who destroy the life of the Sinhalese. Do you see the way our minds work? There is no difference between a dead body of a Sinhalese, and the dead body of this young man. Had I labelled that dead body saying: this is the body of a Sinhalese boy ... he was a Buddhist ... he was a person from Kandy ... he was from my old school etc., what would my state of mind have been then? The same scene, but different reactions. We have to be very alert to understand the way we create these concepts in our minds. Otherwise we either attach to them or develop aversion.

I would like to present you with some other examples to show you how some people are attached to their concepts. One such concept is religion. I meet a variety of people from so many different countries. Among them some are Buddhists, some are Christians, some follow Islam, and some others are Hindus. I have met some others who follow Krishnamurti or Rajneesh. I meet some people who like to discuss religion rather than to practice it. There are some who deny all religions. They believe only in modern science. So I have met a great variety of people.

But when I am with them I have seen some common features between all of them. Whenever they believe in a religion, or whatever the concept they believe in, they build a framework in their minds. A Buddhist may build a Buddhist framework, a Christian a Christian framework ... Within these larger frameworks, there can be some smaller frames: there are some people who believe in these small frames also. I have seen how most people are so attached to these frameworks. If someone tries to say anything against what they believe in they easily get angry. If someone criticises the founder of this religion or that philosophy their state of mind is the same. There are so many examples that we can see in our own daily lives of how people fight to prove their own belief.

Another feature I have seen in these people is that they use a vocabulary peculiar to that particular belief system. When someone asks a question they produce that set form of words, and after that they think the problem is solved!

In another instance, when I was having a discussion with some school children we came to the topic of *dukkha*, suffering. I asked then if they knew the meaning of this word, *dukkha*. Most students were able to give an answer based on the definition which is given in all the textbooks for describing suffering. For this answer they will score full marks at school. But when I asked why they said that birth brings suffering they had no answer. They had no explanation either, as to why they said death is suffering. This aspect is common to most people today. They are able to quote something, but without proper understanding. As Buddhists haven't we got used to do the same thing?

I know some people who even appropriate the personal names from within these frameworks for their own use. One Krishnamurti follower had named his son J. Krishnamurti! Another businessman named his children using the names of Arahats. What he hoped from this was to be reminded of the Dhamma on his deathbed!

If we understand that we are the same, just like prisoners inside these conceptual frameworks, what is the solution? Can you think of a solution? Would you give up the frame or would you not use the ideas from within these frames?

As a meditator you can discover what a concept is, and what the reality is. If someone can understand that, then there's no problem. He can use the conceptual framework knowing it for what it is. The best example that is given in the Dhamma in this connection is the simile of the raft. We have to use the raft in order to cross the river, but thereafter we don't need to carry it with us on our heads! It is very important to understand this. Then we don't criticise the other frameworks; and we are not hurt because others criticise our frameworks. We are not attached to them.

So finally, I would like to define meditation as the medicine for the sickness we create ourselves. As we are the ones who create our own suffering, we ourselves have to take this medicine. When we realise that we are being cured of the sickness that we were suffering, then we are can trust the medicine.

Such a person is free from the burden of problems no matter in what environment they live. This is what is described as "Freedom" in the Dhamma.