Fear

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 38:17

Fear.

What the meditation is trying to do is trying to get you in contact with fear before you call it fear. What's fear before you recognize it as fear? What is it? It's a bit nauseating. It's an uncomfortable feeling in the body. As soon as the mind recognises it as fear, it categorises it, blocks it. And as soon as it's done that, it'll react. It'll start being afraid of fear. And that's how we suppress stuff. We just push it away with fear. Don't want to see it. So you can't get right down there, you've got to go through those two barriers.

So when fear arises, this is in your meditation now, when fear arises, you first of all have to hold steady and just feel that panic. See, the panic's the fear of the fear, which is making you run. You just hang on in there, you wait for it to die down. And then what you're building up is bravery, isn't it? Bravery is being able to stand in the midst of fear, not move. So you stand there. And then as your reaction goes away, you're still shaking from the fear. So then you get interested in it, not as an emotion. Because that immediately brings up all sorts of concepts and ideas. You can even get into a wild goose chase of trying to find out why you're afraid. Get into a personal therapy.

When you get into a personal therapy, just remind yourself that it's the deluded trying to find out how they're deluded. And the definition of delusion is, you don't know where the delusion is, so you wouldn't be deluded. So, when fear comes up and you try and chase some historical moment when all this fear was gathered, then actually all you're doing is not facing the fear. You're trying to get behind it or before it. And even if you did remember the occasion, would it help? So okay, it was when your mother hit you with a banana across the ear when you were three years old. So what? You're still stuck with the fear. You're still stuck with the aftermath.

So one has to get into the feel of it. So then you point your attention to the quality of its feeling, its sensations, the sensations it's calling. And as you go into it, you taste it. You get a feel for fear. And you just sit in the midst of that.

And when you sit in the midst of fear, what's happening? It's just a mental, physical turbulence, isn't it? It's like a bit of bad weather running through the organism, isn't it? You're just sat there just with this nausea or something. It's pitting your stomach or you might have it in your chest. You're just sitting there, that's it. You babysit. Just sit with it.

And as you're sitting with it, you might notice that it's a process. You might notice that there's no such thing as, this is fear. It's just a set of arising and passing away of sensations. They're just little sensations.

And you might get that feeling that actually, to be in the midst of that isn't suffering. It's only suffering when you start reacting to it. It's only suffering when the fear of fear arises.

And then when you get comfortable with the fear, it's okay, you want more of it. You just sat there with it and said, well, come on, let's show your face. It's like a snake, show your face. So we just let it come up, let it come up.

Now, when you let things come up like that, because you're not identifying with it, I am afraid, because you're not pushing it away, feeding the system with fear, with more fear, because you're not turning away in aversion, because you're not trying to seek its origin, because you're not trying to do anything with it, you're therefore not empowering it at all. In which case, like any energy form, it has entropy. It will die away. It dies away.

And then you recognize that actually all you have to do with fear is sit with it. Hug it. I don't want to sound too New Agey there, but just sit with it. And then it passes. It passes. And that's where your confidence comes. And then you translate that to all your negative states. Depression, stress, whatever it is. And you realize you don't have to do anything at all. You just have to sit in the midst of the flames. That's all. And it arises and passes away. And that's it. End of fear. Guaranteed forty years, if you're lucky, because there's a lot down there.

It's not as though you're going to get rid of it. So any ideas of getting rid of fear is also a subtle aversion. You mustn't have any opinion about it. What you're really trying to discover is just how to be with it in a non-reactive way. In so doing, you find, as it were, a place within yourself which is aloof. It's up above. Even though you're in it, you're not of it. So that's what the Buddha's teaching. That's the position we have to take. In the body and mind, in the heart, but not of it.

So that sense of being aloof, of being an observer, an experiencer, a witness. You can get there by just an act of will, by saying, you know, this is an object. You can point to it and say fear. As soon as you point to something, it's an object. So it can't be you, it can't be me. You're already creating a distance just by recognizing it's there. That's not the end point to be an observer. The end point is pure observing. Even that sense of some body observing disappears. But that just arises naturally. You don't have to work at that.

So that's fear. I wouldn't worry about it. There's nothing around that in terms of how you meditate with it, how you actually sit with it. The good thing about strong emotions is that you've, generally speaking, got no problems with concentration.

You have to be aware of your reactions to it too. That's all. Come off all head stuff. As soon as you start thinking, imaging something, cut. Come down to the body. Because that's how an emotion develops itself, through thought. It's through the technique of imaginative thinking that emotions develop themselves. You all know that from when somebody says some little thing that upsets you in the morning and then

quite unwittingly you keep thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it. By the evening you're chucking them out of the window and doing all sorts of nasty things and all day you've made them insult you. And they only did it once. And it's just because that little irritation has grown and grown through the force of our imagination.

So imagination, any thought around fear, you just recognize it as fear and then you come back into the body. So doing you stop it. So now that feeling of fear has only one place to come out, which is through the body as a feeling. So if you think of the mind as an energy system like the weather, this is just a bit of a storm coming up, let it come and let it pass away.

So now, in daily life, of course, it's a different position. When you're meditating, you're at the interface, you might say, between consciousness and thoughts, consciousness and emotions, consciousness and sensations in the body. When you're meditating like that, ask yourself, where's the personality? It's only when you get up and speak and do that suddenly a personality appears, a personal writing. When you're looking inside yourself, what do you see? A thought? An emotion? So this becoming of a personality is a different position. You're in now the flow of your actions and your speech.

So now, when fear comes up, or anxiety comes up in action, then, as it were, we've still got to try to maintain just that sense of knowing it's there. Knowing it's there. And because of that knowing it's there, you've lifted yourself out of it. Even though this is saying, run, run, run, run, you keep walking. Because you've not fallen into the delusion of the fear. So even though the fear is tearing at you and they're saying, run, run, run, run, you keep walking, you keep walking. Because you're above it.

And if you feel it's the same thing, when the panic comes, you say, just stop, hang on in there. You can't handle it, run. It's alright. And then when it passes, just reflect on that. Hmm, that's interesting. And so in other words, you've got to take your meditation, this insight, into daily life. And don't worry if you so-called don't succeed, because all that's shown is the strength of our conditioning. So that takes a little humility. This is the way it is at the moment. But you work gently against it.

Even if you have a very strong fear, like obsessional stuff. One person who worked with me had problems with contamination. Couldn't go near certain areas that had been contaminated with certain substances. And I was just trying really to, through the meditation, to get her to have enough confidence that she could stay within that fear, and then to try to get the person to walk into that contaminated area.

So, in this case it didn't work that way. If you take that as an example, we all have fear, we all have anxieties and this and that, so it's a case of knowing that it can't kill you, it's only an emotion that comes out. And then just building up through your own self, through your own reflection to move towards that area which is dangerous. Hang on in there. Stay there, just keep moving towards it.

Now ultimately, what's the ultimate point? The ultimate point is the loss of fear of fear. And when you've lost your fear of fear, what's going to frighten you? It's at that point that fear drops away. And that's why,

through your meditation, you should see that there's a possibility of the end of fear, the complete ending of fear.

Yes, of course that's difficult. I mean, you can take an absolutist stance and say that all fear is false projection, but obviously there is a level where it becomes inappropriate, shall we say. It's not fixed to the actual situation. As the case that I've just pointed out, this particular person, if some substance or other, if she thought that some substance or other was in this room, she couldn't go into it. And it was irrational. She was irrational. It wasn't as though she was crazy. But she couldn't go into that room.

So often you can perceive that your fear is irrational. For instance, if you have, on holiday, you have a fear of jumping off the high board at the swimming pool. Fear is irrational, isn't it? So, if you have that fear, you go up there and do it. You keep doing it until the fear, until you've actually, until you've no fear of it. But in so doing it with meditation, you're actually learning how to be with fear and not to let it hijack you.

Now, there comes that shady area where you don't know whether it's fear or not, whether it's appropriate fear or not. In which case, what can you do? You have to test it. You can only investigate a situation and find out whether in fact your fear was correct or not. How else? You don't know. That's the problem with delusion. You just don't know. You have to keep testing things.

Absolutely. I mean, there should be, shall we say, that background fear, for want of a better word, whenever we're crossing a busy road, isn't it? It's just that the fear then becomes a guardian, where you never actually feel the fear, but the fear is running as it were in the background because you know if you make a mistake you're going to get run over.

This is much the same as shame, dread, guilt. When we do something which is unskillful, unwholesome, then these emotions arise, these states of mind arise. But what the Buddha calls them, guardians of society. Not in the sense that they are wholesome because we've done something wrong, but when we've done something wrong and we've felt the inner reaction of shame, dread and guilt, then as it were, it's just like that background program.

So the Buddha says, you can get sensitive enough so that as soon as an unskillful, unwholesome idea arises in the mind, it recoils, it recoils like a feather from the flame. And that's that inner conditioning about, well if I do this, this is what's going to happen. And I dare say that there are inbuilt fear mechanisms just in the mind itself, which is self-protective.

But that's not the same as what we're talking about, in a sense, because that just arises and passes away when it's pure. Oops, don't go there. That's it, it's gone. It's like the heart telling you, you know, there's danger there. That's totally different from the normal fears and anxieties that we feel ordinarily.

Oh, well, that's what I meant about as soon as you label it, you categorize it and then all your history comes in and before you know it, you're stuck with an ogre, where in fact it was just a little tickling in the stomach. A little tickle in the solar plexus. That's the problem with history.

I mean, my own personal opinion is that the fully liberated person wouldn't feel fear at all, apart from that fear of just knowing something is dangerous, as a background understanding, you might say. Just on the grounds that there's no association at all anymore, there's no identity or wrong understanding of what this body, mind and heart is. Once it's not you, it's not a big problem, is it?

You can intellectualize, you can rationalize and say, well, I know my body's not me, it's going to die, etc., etc. But then when the doctor tells you you've got six weeks to go, you freak out. So there's a difference between an intellectual grasp of something, an understanding of something, and actually moving to that level of consciousness which no longer identifies with the body.

But I dare say it's root stuff. I mean, the place where these emotions are kept, the amygdala or something, I think that's what they call it, comes from reptilian life, doesn't it? I mean, it's part of that whole evolution of basic life. The reason that our emotions, it seems, are civilized is because they're all channeled through the front part of the brain, which is new to human beings, it seems. But when they escape, that's when you get the road rage, computer rage, things like that.

I had the experience last week of leaving the barn for a week and travelling around and staying in different houses, and I found it very difficult to keep my meditation practice going and the mindfulness. I'm wondering if you had any pointers towards maintaining practice on the road.

Yeah, well, that's the big difficulty, isn't it? First of all, you just have to recognise that a place like this, a meditation centre, has special conditions. People try not to disturb you for a start. Generally speaking, people try to respect your silence and respect what you're doing, which isn't so in the outside world. So you'll never get the same quality in ordinary daily life as what you do in the centre until there's been a real purge of the heart. So I think it's unrealistic to think that you're just going to walk out of a meditation centre or the barn like this and take it with you.

So it's a case of recognising that you have to put in some coping mechanisms. It's very much a case of keeping up the practice morning and evening. The morning is a time when you remind yourself what level of consciousness you want to be at during the day. And the evening - I don't mean just flop into bed, just fall asleep - in the evening, say after work or before you eat, sit and just let whatever you've accumulated during the day arise and pass away. Then, of course, you have a very pleasant meal and a more pleasant evening.

The other thing is just simple things like if you find yourself rushing, stop. One thing at a time. Breathe. When you're talking to somebody, remind yourself to listen. If you've got the answer ready before they finish, you're not listening. You can't listen and answer at the same time. The brain can't do that. So you're presuming what they're going to say and you've already given them an answer. So it's just relaxing into what's happening. And of course what you find is that when you do that, the other person does it.

Yesterday it was rather funny really. I'd gone to a cafe with somebody to have a coffee and then we were

walking back because we were trying to open another bank account for this trust. As we were walking there, the pace sort of lifted and halfway through, Anne - some of you know Anne Ashton - she said to me, "God, you're walking fast." And I said, "I thought you were walking fast." And we were just firing off each other without knowing it. By the end of it, I was running to this damn bank. So it's a case of just recognising that - perhaps the coffee was too strong, maybe that's what did it.

If we're sharp enough, if we can maintain that sharpness of mindfulness and recognise that mindfulness or awareness doesn't have to be trapped into one single object, it can be quite wide. Even now, as you're listening to me, and that's where the point of your attention is, you can still be slightly aware of the bird chirping out there and just the colours in the room. It's like that wide awareness. And to get that, you have to be very relaxed. As soon as you get tight, the whole thing contracts. And so it's that effort just to keep relaxing - feel your shoulders, just let the breath go for a little while. Then you just have to keep doing it and keep doing it and keep doing it, and just very slowly you try to take life easy.

And then little reflections like, does it help to rush? Does it help to get irritated? What does it do? What's the point of it? It doesn't mean that we don't get irritated and we don't rush. It's just that we're trying to slowly work against these old habits which are deeply ingrained and are reinforced by society. This is the problem. If you were to stay here for a year or so, then it would begin to undermine a certain conditioning. But the effort has to be made because the one feeds into the other. If you meditate for a week or something and then go out and have sex, drugs and rock and roll, then you've had it. You come back and you've still got these headaches and backaches and it's as though you've got to take it into daily life.

And don't expect great change - very slow. It comes over a long period of time. I remember once when I came back from the East meditating, and a very old friend of mine came up who's a long-time meditator and his first question was, "Is there a quicker way?" That was the only thing he was actually concerned with. Is there a quicker way than this? I'm afraid that - well, if you find one, come and tell me about it.

Stopping is a very strong technique. If you leave a room, for instance, and you've picked up a bit of irritation there, if you just open the door, close the door mindfully, and then just stand for a moment and just recognise what's happening. And then just wait for it to die out a little. Then you find it doesn't snowball. You don't take it with you into the next room and off it goes. So you ratchet things up all the time.

Any other questions?

Just a question about right effort, that balance between too much effort and not enough, the technique to find the best way to concentrate but not put too much pressure on it. But, you know, staying in an easy... Yeah, just in particular meditation.

Ah. Well, I've always thought that's pretty easy, actually, to get over that one. Because we are Westerners,

we have to achieve. Okay? So make your achievement just being aware. That is the achievement, to be aware. That's it. You don't have to worry about insights. Just be aware of what's happening. Put the whole of your effort in just knowing what's actually happening now. As soon as you put any expectation to it, as soon as you put an idea to it, then of course you are bringing some sort of extra to that present moment-to-moment awareness. So you're not looking for anything, you're just looking at what's coming up. And to do that, you have to relax. So your posture should be held up at the spine and everything else relaxed. You relax on the object.

And to keep the attention there, don't worry about concentration. Raise the interest. Just ask yourself, when did you ever lose concentration if you were interested in something? It comes naturally. If the interest isn't there, if there's boredom, then you have to say, "Well, now that's interesting." Any object which comes, you have to raise that question mark. And it's a childlike curiosity. And it's questioning, do I really know? Do I really know?

So I sit there and I think, well, as we were discussing, fear. Do I really, really know what fear is before I name it? Do I really, really know what an emotion is before I conceptualise it? Because that's the process in the mind. First there's a sensation or a feeling, then there's some sort of labelling or perceptual process, and then the history comes in, and that's it. Even in very simple things like, you might see one of these flowers. So you might name it, you know, a rose or something. But do you know it? Do you know that particular rose? Or have you just looked at it and it's just fitted into a pattern of a rose so then you've seen it. But have you gone up and really looked at the colour, looked at the veins in the petals, seen the shape of the petals, have you actually smelt it? But we're happy just to say that's a rose and then we think we know it.

So it's raising that curiosity as to what is actually happening now and recognising that that is the achievement. That's it. That's all the Buddha's teaching. *Satipaṭṭhāna* - awareness and intuitive intelligence. It's just the establishment of that. And it comes when you have right attitude. You just want to know what's happening now. So you just rest your eye on it. So you can practise this on ordinary things. So the next time you're out in the garden there and see a flower, just rest your eye on it. You don't look for anything, just rest your eye on it and see what the perceptual faculty is doing. Observe how the mind observes the flower. Just be aware of where the eyes are going. And that's it.

And when you catch yourself with wrong effort - and you know that because you get tight. I mean the other side of course is that you lose energy and you fall asleep. That's not so painful. But the other side when you get tight and you start feeling nasty about yourself and all that, then just go into the feelings of it, the sensations of it. There's something crept in there about achieving it, that's all. So, as you know, the mind's very subtle. You think you're doing it right, and then you find out afterwards you weren't doing it right. But that's alright. Just to find out that you weren't doing it right is a step forward. And sometimes you find out you didn't do it right, and now you think, "Well, from now on I will do it right." And a little bit later you realise you've done it wrong again. So, that's alright. That's how slippery the mind is.

Does that help?

Any other questions? Anything else? Is it time for tea then?

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