Why Noting Without Stop

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 7:08

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

Just a quick note about the technique. In the strict Mahāsi tradition one doesn't stop noting. And the reason for that is that that which is noting is the discerning mind. For those of you who know your *khandh as*, that's the *vijñāna*. It's the mind that is able to distinguish between black and white and know what something is for. It's that sort of — it's the higher faculty of the mind.

And it works on basic perceptions, basic cognitions. And it uses words, it uses concepts, it uses images, but mainly it uses words, thinking. And at first, the beginner, when you start the Mahāsi, it's up front in your face, it's like you're watching yourself, all you're aware of are these words coming out of your head. And then as you keep displacing your attention on feeling, on sensation, the word recedes or becomes like a quiet note in the background.

As you then begin to settle in on an object, begin to fix in on an object, we were talking yesterday about this two stages of *vitakka-vicāra*, the bee flying around the flower and the bee landing. So as you're noting the bees flying around the flower and then suddenly you find yourself landing on the flower and the noting again might seem to get in the way so the meditator stops the noting and before long they're wandering again because the landing on the flower has not matured.

If you say to yourself, well, my mind is really — my attention is steady, like that's a thought that arises, I'm really steady on the rising and falling of some object, and you keep noting, that noting now becomes automatic. And sometimes you might find it more skillful not to note so much what it is you're experiencing, but the process of experiencing. So instead of saying something like pain, pain or something, or it might even be a subtle sensation for which there's no word, and you might use the word feeling. And you're using the word feeling to describe what it is you're actually feeling.

But at that point, it's often more skillful to describe what you're actually doing, which is feeling the object. So when you say feeling, feeling, you're driving your attention closer and closer, more steady on the object in the act of feeling. You're actually feeling. Because this *satipaññā*, this awareness, intuitive intelligence, intuitive awareness has the ability not only to understand, observe at that level, but also directly feels, directly experiences.

And at that point of when that bee really sticks to the flower, you may be surprised to find that this very noting mind distances itself, so that there's quite a clear separation between the knowing and the noting.

And this noting carries on, because it's been conditioned to carry on discerning. So just like when you've learnt to walk, and now when you walk across the road, you don't have to be aware of your legs, the legs just do it. So this discerning mind keeps discerning, and you're aware of the object and this discerning mind. But the discerning mind is still helping you, is still keeping you on the object. See, still keeping you there.

And in the classic Mahāsi teaching you don't stop because at some point that bee begins to so suck the nectar that it loses itself in the nectar and there's — it sounds a bit dramatic — a collapse. There's a complete joining of this *satipaññā* with what it's actually experiencing at which point this thinking mind shuts down and at that point this *satipaññā* is at its purest — not that insights can't come before that but at this point it is extremely pure and it's not something you can manufacture.

You can get yourself to that point by just diligently noting and diligently guiding your attention to the object. You can't make it collapse, because that collapse is a non-self experience. It's beyond your power. Because as soon as you say, let it collapse, there's somebody there saying, let it collapse. You can't do it. So that has to happen naturally.

Now, it's very difficult, generally speaking, to arrive at that sort of concentration within a week. It takes, you know, because we spent three days just getting it together. But if you do move towards the end of the week, towards that singularity, that feeling, it's like you almost feel it like a gear change, like there's a drop. People experience it in a different way. And you can feel yourself stuck. And the mistake is that the meditator thinks, oh, right now I'm really concentrating. So they stop the noting. The mind wanders and then it becomes a game, you see. So it's a case of being skillful at that point to not overestimate the level of concentration you've got, the level of focus you've got.

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