Discourse on the Taints (MN 2): Overcome by Seeing

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 21:46

Good evening, happy YouTubers. I trust you had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So, we have been looking at the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta, the discourse on right view, and now we want to do the end bit. If you remember, the question that Sāriputta, who is the person teaching here, was asked goes like this: "Might there be another way in which a noble disciple is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma, and has arrived at this true Dhamma?"

"There might be, friends," says Sāriputta. "When a noble disciple understands the taints, the origin of the taints, the cessation of the taints, and the way leading to the cessation of the taints, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at the true Dhamma."

Now, fortunately, we have a whole discourse devoted to the taints. This word "taint" translates *āsava*. I think we're closer to the understanding if you think of the word as meaning an oozing, as in sap from a tree, or in this case pus from a boil, because these *āsava*, these taints, are the fundamental expression of our delusion.

The first one is, you won't be surprised, sensual pleasure. The second one is the desire to become, to exist, to continue existing. And the third one is ignorance, but later on, wrong view was attached to it. If we can think of ignorance as delusion, as the way ignorance expresses itself. So we have this triad, this trio of roots. That's something else, the *mūla*. So you've got plenty of categories: three of these, four of those, ten of them, illimitable.

The three roots are those roots that cause all our unwholesome behaviour: *lobha, dosa, moha* — that's greed, aversion, and delusion. So ignorance has to be translated into some sort of delusive understanding. And as I say, in some recensions, the taints include wrong view.

Okay, so now this is the Buddha: "Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park." So remember, Anāthapiṇḍika was his main lay supporter,

bought him this field, covered it with gold, bought it from Prince Jeta.

"There he addressed the bhikkhus. 'Bhikkhus!' 'Venerable sir,' they replied. The Blessed One said, 'Bhikkhus, I shall teach you a discourse on the restraint of the taints. Listen and attend closely to what I have to say.' 'Yes, venerable sir,' the bhikkhus replied." Remember, bhikkhus here is anybody who's listening.

"Bhikkhus, I say that the destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see. Who knows and sees what? Wise attention and unwise attention. When one attends unwisely, unarisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unarisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned."

So it's where we put our attention. Don't forget, every time you attend, there's an intention. So it's empowering. You're conditioning yourself. Every time you pay attention to something, you're conditioning yourself. And what the Buddha is saying is that you've got to have the right attention.

And then he tells us how to get rid of these taints. There are taints that should be abandoned by seeing. There are taints that should be abandoned by restraining. There are taints that should be abandoned by using. There are taints that should be abandoned by enduring. There are taints that should be abandoned by avoiding. And there are taints that should be abandoned by removing. And there are taints that should be abandoned by developing.

So that's seven ways in which we can get rid of these taints, this oozing, this pus oozing from our hearts. And they depend on what taint we're actually dealing with.

So the first one — hopefully we'll finish tonight but we might have to go tomorrow — is the taint abandoned by seeing. Now this seeing is *vipassanā*, and with this particular method, what he's dealing with here specifically is what leads a person to the first path and fruit, what we call stream entry, a glimpse of *Nibbāna*.

"So a non-taught ordinary person who has no regard for the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in the Dhamma, who has no regard for true men and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, does not understand things that are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. Since that is so, he attends to those things unfit for attention and he does not attend to those things fit for attention."

"Now, what are the things unfit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen taint of sensual desire arises in him and the arisen taint of sensual desire increases. The unarisen taint of becoming arises in him and the arisen taint of becoming increases. The unarisen taint of ignorance arises in him and the arisen taint of ignorance increases." So these are things that are unfit to attend to. And then he says the opposite for things that are fit to attend to.

So now he goes on to the specific bit that has to do with this seeing, seeing things as they really are, which

leads to insight.

So this is how he attends unwisely. In this particular case: "Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I become in the future?"

"Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the present thus: Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?"

So these are all existential questions — why am I here? What's the meaning of life? — just put in this way of the self, the me, me.

And then he says when he attends unwisely in this way, six views arise in him. So we have six different ways of defining this self.

The first one is: "The view 'self exists for me' arises in him as true and established." So now this self is the feeling that there's something in me that is eternal. It's an eternalist feeling that there's something in me, this me, this I that I feel myself to be, is eternal.

Next one is: "The view 'no self exists for me' arises in him as true and established." So this, of course, is annihilationism. This is a materialist view of life. Now this self has no reality. I might feel very strongly about the self, might feel myself very strongly, but actually when I die the whole thing disappears completely. And that's the materialist annihilationist view of the self.

The next one is: "I perceive self with self." Now this is the peculiar ability that we have of becoming aware of the body, aware of myself. So there's two there: there's myself and I'm aware of myself. So this is the self-awareness and the body and mind. So that ability of being self-aware, to make the mistake of being — well, what I'm aware of is me. It's another form of eternalism in a way.

"I perceive not-self with self arises in him as true and established." So in this case, the observer, the feeler, what we experience in meditation is the only real, and the body and mind is just experience which arise and pass away, but it's not me. But the observer is me. And the observer will have that sense of eternality about it.

"The view 'I perceive self with not-self' arises in him as true and established." Now, in this case, the person does not believe that the observer is the real, but what is observed: the body, heart, and mind. And this equates really to the scientific materialism, because what's understood is that the body is basic — your cells, chemicals and electrical impulses — and they create the mind and all your subjective experience, and they also create this sense of self.

So all this mind and self are emergent properties coming from the physical base. So the sense of self is not real, but the physicality is real. And of course, that's an annihilationist view because we all know that we

die.

So "perceive the self with not-self." To take another example: if you walk into a room and it's full of pieces, mechanical pieces, which you can figure out are the pieces of a car, they're useless. But when you put it all together, the emergent property of a car is that, of course, it can propel itself. That would be an emergent property. It's not within the individual pieces.

So the scientific materialist view is that the body with its cells, with its chemicals, electrical impulses, and all that sort of stuff, create the mind and consciousness. And ultimately, in the human sense, this heightened state of self-awareness.

And the final one is: "It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions. But this self of mine — this self that's experiencing all this — is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity."

And that would be somebody who believes that the body, that the mind, or the heart-mind exists after death forever, that they go into this eternal state, and that it's not part of the body. That would be very close to what I understand of Jainism, where the whole idea is to get rid of the body because the body is the expression of bad *kamma*, rotten *kamma*. When you get rid of the body, the soul — which is, I can translate self as soul here — of mind that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the results of good and bad actions. But this soul of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.

So these are the six selves. I don't know whether you want to remember them. But there's something for us to reflect upon about: well, what do we believe ourselves to be? Do we believe that the self, the sense of self — not the body and mind and all that — actually is eternal? Do we believe that nothing of what we are has any more existence after death, annihilationism? So where do you position yourself? Do you think that awareness, self-awareness is the real and the body and mind are not? Or the other way around, that the observer is not real and it's just an epiphenomena, an emergent property from the body and mind? Do you perceive that the observer is the only real, not the body and mind experience? And the last one, and the last of those three: the perceiver, the perceived is not the self, and the observer is not real, except what is experienced. And then the final one, this full-blown idea of a soul, an eternal soul.

Now, the Buddha says: "These speculative views, bhikkhus, are called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

So I think it'd be good if we worked on this, make sure that you've understood it properly. Now, as individuals, we don't have to know all this stuff. We have to really just contemplate: how do we experience ourselves? What do we experience as something real within ourselves? That's the question

that we have to ask.

So if at some time you just ponder: what am I? What am I? Not what I have been, that's gone. What I will be is yet to come. But how do I experience myself now? What do I really believe myself to be? Where do I stand on that continuum, on that spectrum? Am I an eternalist or a full-blown annihilationist? Or do I sort of pass along that line?

Now, the Buddha says that we're none of it at all. All that stuff, all those beliefs are completely outrageous. They're completely deluded and they're just leading to more suffering. So it's a case of really being able to define where we think we are, where we believe ourselves to be. And in our meditation, just to hang on in there, just leave the question mark open. Leave the question mark on, because the Buddha is clear that there is something in us which simply doesn't belong to this psycho-physical organism. There's lots of quotes — I won't go into it this evening — where he states that.

And of course, that's the whole teaching of *anattā*. He's not saying that there isn't a self, he's just saying whatever we think is a self or a soul or a person doesn't have any real basis. It is just as impermanent as anything we know, as anything we can experience. And because of that mistake we cause ourselves suffering.

In his words — I love this sort of stuff — "When he attends wisely in this way..." That's right: "Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught person..." Well, let's go back a little bit. "This speculative view, bhikkhus, is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. And fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, and grief, and despair. He is not free from suffering, I say."

And then right at the end, he points to this ability of this sort of contemplation and realisation in our meditation to actually enter the first path and fruit: "When he attends wisely in this way, the three fetters are abandoned in him." This is another way of talking about what is actually keeping us in this round of rebirths: personality view — which means actually it's much better to translate that as identity view — identity view, doubt in the Buddha's teaching, and adherence to rules and observances whereby we think rules and observances are actually going to liberate us.

These are called the taints and they should be abandoned by seeing.

Very good. I hope my words have been of some assistance, that they have not caused even greater confusion. And I think now we can begin our sitting.

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