Rest for Autumn

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 15:20

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

I just thought that September's a sort of beginning for people. Academia wakes up, schools go back, the summer holidays are over, and usually people about this time think about what they're going to do during the autumn and winter. So start joining courses and hopefully going to meditation groups.

I just thought to go over some general instructions which we all know, but it's sometimes important to have them reminded to us. And as I'm speaking to you, I'm actually reminding myself of the importance of what I'm saying.

The first thing, of course, is good sleep. You really have to wind down at the end of the day. You've got to give yourself half an hour. It's no good coming off a Netflix horror film and throwing yourself into bed, or coming off social media and then expecting yourself to have a deep sleep. Really, if you can just find that half hour before you intend to sleep, you can do anything. You can do *metta* practice, meditation, read something which is calming, something which is inspiring, listen to music — not heavy rock, more like some spiritual music, something that's calming.

What that does is create this strata underneath the sleep, a sort of calmness underneath the sleep. And then when you're in bed, continue that to find some sort of practice — either relaxing on the breath, not to awaken the inquiry, just to feel the loveliness of it, the body breathing, or *metta*. There are all these little practices, and of course it just helps us to have a deeper sleep.

Then in the morning, that morning sitting. It doesn't matter how long you do it; it's the quality of it. Often when we've been practicing for so long, we just get very lazy, just sit there for an hour with the head going all over the place and we can tick a box. There's not much point in it, rather than sitting ten minutes with good intention.

So I always think it's good practice, when you finally decide to sit, just to stay there for a minute and just think about the worries, concerns, the planning, the excitements that you expect during the day. Because the *Satipaṭṭhāna* discourse actually begins by putting aside those things. So it's recognizing what's there at the back of the mind and just putting them to the side. It's not as though you're going to forget them.

And then, of course, you have to make this clear determination that you are going to put effort into the practice. It's good to start with just a little bit of calming meditation — place the attention on the breath.

The mind is very busy. Don't forget there are these five touch points: you feel your knee and you feel the other knee, feel your hand, feel the other hand, and then come back to the breath. As you feel yourself settling, at one point when you get back to the breath you could probably stay there.

When you feel that settlement, just begin by recognizing the beginning and end of the breath, and of course be open to whatever draws your attention. Now during that sit, something might come up which is pretty obvious which keeps your attention — some difficult emotion, some pain, some discomfort.

So we can remind ourselves of the process of *vipassanā*. When something unpleasant comes up, that's the easiest really — one immediately recognizes your relationship, the aversion, not wanting that at all. Remember, this is the direct psychological cause for our suffering, and it's a case of staying with that and hanging on in there until it completely passes. Then you find this equanimity with whatever's being presented. Of course, you're actually growing in patience too, being able to bear what is unpleasant.

And then you distance it. So there you've got this *anattā*. Whatever you're looking at is not me, not mine. You can use a little word like "there." So there's a discomfort. There's some emotional turbulence. And you create that distinction between whatever is feeling it and what is being felt.

Although in the literature you always get this word "observing," the accent should be on feeling, actually directly experiencing what's happening. Once that's established, it's as though you can go into it and deconstruct it, find out what it's made of. So a pain might end up just being tightness or fiery feelings. An emotion could just be wobbliness or a feeling of sickness or something. But as you go in there at that level, the quality of impermanence is a bit more obvious to you.

So just in that movement — recognizing the reaction, waiting for it to pass, distancing what it is you're looking at, and then investigating more closely — you're actually exercising this curiosity around the three characteristics of existence, and that's what's going to liberate us. The fact that emotional turbulences are actually dying away, they're blowing out, you might say, they're being transformed into their opposite just by allowing that energy to arise and express itself. That's by the by. So you have to be careful you don't slip into psychotherapy because it's happening quite naturally. You don't have to work at it.

As you progress in the sitting and your mind's wandering and all that, don't keep forcing yourself back. Just stop for a minute and ask yourself, what is it that's making the mind wander? Come back in the body. It could be that you're also coming through a time when you're feeling a bit dozy, a bit tired. So then make that your observation, so that you're awakening this understanding of actually feeling things and allowing this intuitive awareness to make its own understandings.

When you come to the end — this is what I try and get people to do — reflect upon the hour. Don't forget, if you've really made the effort, it doesn't matter whether the mind's been wandering all over the place. It's the effort to come back and restart, restart. We ought to congratulate ourselves. An extra biscuit. And if you thought, well, you could have done better, well, you have to encourage yourself. It's no good punching

yourself on the nose. What's the point of that?

And then after that, make some resolution. So it could be, if you didn't feel you were so committed to being in the present, just make that resolution: "Next time I'll really make that commitment." And if there was a part that you felt you really were highly investigative and the mind was breaking, encourage yourself: "I've got to get there next time."

And then, of course, after that, there's *metta*. So this *metta* is really helping that equanimity that you need for the *vipassanā*, so that you're not coming from an "I know" place or any sense of preference or anything like that. It's undermining the possibility of its corruption into what we call the subtle enemy, which is indifference, aloofness. It stops you engaging, so it's really important that the *metta* is practiced after any *v ipassanā* sitting.

That's the time you can bring to mind people you're going to meet during the day, and in so doing you're preparing yourself for that meeting, especially people whom you might be having some difficulties with. Those two things are important.

And then make that decision to try and feel at ease during the day. Keep coming back to just relaxing into the present moment. What helps that is to keep stopping. You'll see writers use the word "pausing." I prefer the word just "stop." Just stop and just catch what it is that you're developing sometimes unknowingly, like a little irritation, a little anxiety, whatever's there, a little excitement, and just allow it to drop. Keep coming back to that level of contentment because that's where we'll find that ease with living.

You're always ahead of yourself, either because you're anxious about something or because you want to do something, and it's just a waste of energy really. If we make that effort just to stop and just come back to a place of ease, you'll see that it tends to support mindfulness, but it also saves so much energy because emotions and such really draw upon our energy.

And then to develop this affectionate awareness — that's why we go through the discourse on loving kindness at the end of this session — because what the Buddha's inviting us to do, encouraging us to do, is to develop an affectionate awareness.

The awareness is, of course, being bright, being awake to what's actually happening. And the affectionate is referring to a general attitude in the heart of kindliness. So even now, as you're listening to me and as you're seeing me, you can actually develop a nice attitude of kindliness towards me. It would make me feel so much better to know that so many people are beaming this lovely kindness towards me.

If you have that as a general attitude, which you've developed as a general attitude, you can see it calms situations. It just undermines anybody who might be a little miffed with you or something like that. But it's also good for us. It creates this lovely feeling of an inner gentle happiness.

So put those two words together. It's not just mindfulness; it's affectionate mindfulness — mindfulness

with kindliness. That's one of the things the Buddha says that we should do. We should look at each other with kindly eyes.

And then see if you can find some time in the day to spend just five minutes, ten minutes, just being with yourself.

Finally, when you get to the evening, coming back from work or a day out or whatever, just sit down somewhere and recollect the day. If you find the mind wanders a lot when you're doing that, you can always write it on a bit of paper. As you go through the day, you can see where you've been skillful, where you could have been more skillful.

That sort of reflection is very helpful because it slowly wakens us up to certain habits that we'd like to be rid of and certain habits that we'd like to develop. Having been brought up Catholic, we were always told in the evening to have an examination of conscience. That's how they put it. So we always thought, "Oh my, I better get to confession pretty quick." But it's a good thing — you just go through the day recollecting what's happened, and it just makes you more aware of yourself.

And then of course, try and do some sitting — it doesn't matter how long, five minutes, ten minutes — before you eat. Doing it after you eat is miserable. You just fall asleep. And then you've got the evening with more energy.

These are just basic reminders on how to sort of go through the day gently, at ease. That's what we do on the *metta*, when we do the *metta* practice, to live more contented, be more contented with what we have, and in harmony — that harmony with the world, whatever's happening around us. These are just little pointers to remind ourselves.

On top of that, it's always good to have a little bit of feed intellectually — just an occasional read from a book, a spiritual book, a Buddhist book or something, or listen to a talk. It's just that little bit of encouraging ourselves to just keep the practice turning over.

So I hope this little talk has been of some use, that you're all eager now to sit in meditation and that I've not actually undermined your hopes to do so. Thank you very much, and that you will be liberated by your practice sooner rather than later.

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