

Sati in Daily Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 15:28

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed, Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

The meditation that we do, this *vipassanā*, puts us into a peculiar position with ourselves. Having found this position within ourselves, we abstract from everything that we would normally call ourselves. Everything becomes an object, something to observe. Somehow we have to re-enter that psycho-physical organism and wander about the world.

Sometimes we mistake that meditation in daily life, thinking that we have to be self-aware, to try and keep this distance within ourselves. Well, that of course creates quite a split. Although self-awareness does arise at times, even if it arises in not such a skillful way—such as when we're embarrassed, you become very self-aware—the fact that it arises sometimes is not a problem. But if we think that that's the way we ought to be, then it does become a problem because there's a split. There's me trying to watch myself trying to do something. You can't do it. Try reading while watching yourself read. You can't do it. So we have to re-engage.

Now what we come to recognise within ourselves is that a lot of the things that we do are coming from wrong attitudes. In the classic teaching it's all to do with greed, with acquisitiveness, all to do with aversion and fear, anxiety—both the aversion of pushing away and the aversion of running away. So knowing that, it's important before we begin an action to actually be quite clear about our attitude.

In the Eightfold Path, remember, right understanding is first. This is what we get through the meditation, and it drops into a right attitude, into a heart state. That attitude, remember, is not an emotional state—it's where you put your will. Why are you doing what you're doing? Being very clear about that, when you enter into the action, then we're producing good conditionings within ourselves.

Just on a very simple level, if you say that you'll help somebody, you might be in a habit of just saying yes. Will you do this? Yes. And then after you've said it, you say to yourself, what did I say that for? I don't want to do that. You get quite negative about it, and you do it, but there's a grudge there. So what was meant to be a very beautiful thing, a very happy thing to do, turns into something quite painful.

Now if you have stopped and then actually made that a point of reflection and then said yes, I'll help, then that comes from a right attitude and then you get the gift of happiness from it. So that ability to make the right intention—in order to do that, we've got to get in the habit of stopping, of actually just a moment of reflection. That's one of the very skillful habits that we can get into.

When you've finished an action, no matter what it is, there's a stop, and the next intention comes. You can see that intention if you don't stop, then you're in that rush mode. If you look at the Eightfold Path, you see it begins with right understanding. We form an intention from it, which is the right attitude, and then that affects the way we speak, what we do, and our livelihood—how we're actually making a living.

Now the two main attitudes or the two main positions that we have to take is this sense of attention—putting our attention where we want to put it—and the other one is care. That's where we put the heart. So these two things, attention and care, are the guiding modes that we need for everything we do.

To get that attention right, it's a case of putting ourselves into the action, a full engagement in what we're doing. It's at those points that we see that sense of self-awareness disappears. If it comes with care as well, then the heart's behind it, and you find that that movement into a loss of self-awareness, into what you're doing, comes with ease.

Now it happens to us naturally when we're doing something we love to do. If you're a gardener, for instance, you might finish something, and when you look back at the action, you can see that it's done beautifully, it's done well. But there's been no sense of time, and during that no sense of time, there's been no sense of self. So there's an absorption into the action.

Sometimes you do it when you're reading. You do it easily when you're watching a film. No sense of time. You just wake up and it's two hours long. Those moments when they actually happen from the right understanding, with the right attitude—when we go into that experience, that's the enlightened mind.

We're in that peculiar paradox that when we're completely happy like that, we don't know it. As soon as you know you're happy, you lost it, because then there's "I am happy." There's a split, there's a break between the happiness and you knowing that you're happy. And then, of course, you know it's going to end anyway, because everything arrives and passes away.

Now, on the other side of the equation, there is the negativity that we have which is stored up from past behaviour, from past wrong thinking. What we learn from our meditation is that you don't fight it, you don't try and get rid of it—you have to, as it were, accompany it.

Take our work. I would say it's impossible to do a job without sometimes feeling bored about it. Where does that boredom come from? Why does boredom arise? It's one of our big problems in this society because of the access to easy pleasure, easy entertainment, easy distraction. When the mind is always seeking some sort of excitement, and you have to go back and do the same work and say the same things day after day, and there isn't the excitement there, then what you get is this aversion, which is boredom.

So then the boredom says to you, look, what you need is variety. Variety is the spice of life. So then you go seeking this variety, but it becomes an obsession, an addiction to try and constantly find the next buzz. And the more you work at that, the more you find that you're more quickly bored by what you're doing,

because you can't keep that high level of excitement all the time.

When we find ourselves being bored about something, the answer to that is repetition. You keep doing it. You keep doing it knowing that the boredom is there and that it's coming from wrong understanding, and you keep placing your attention on what you're doing. And then we find, magically, that the interest rises again. The commitment rises again.

Now to undermine all this business around seeking excitement in life is the quality of equanimity, calmness. You'll notice that we always begin the meditation with that calmness. It's really beginning to develop a taste for calmness, for the neutral, for a state of equanimity that begins to balance our lives, so that we're not always seeking this excitement, this distraction.

In a sense, that's our default position. If during daily life we can, every so often, even if it's only for a few seconds, just fall back into that state of stopping, re-establish the calmness of the body, calmness of the mind, the stillness, silence of the mind, calmness of the heart, and then in that position, we want to retain that. So as it were, open outwards. So it's a receptive mode. We're not going out, we're receiving. That's your equanimity.

If that's your default position, you can see that anything which touches that equanimity is going to be interesting, because you're not walking into the next moment with some preconception, some expectations, some idea of attaining or getting or achieving.

So in that default mode where we're just very calm, very still, very equanimous, we can repeat to ourselves that at this moment we're being, not trying to become something. We're not achieving anything, going anywhere, not trying to be anybody. That's a relief. That's a real holiday.

And then, when the next thing to be done arises in the mind—the next thing to be done, wash the pots—make the intention: wash the pots. And when you wash the pots, your attention is on what you're doing.

If you're speaking to somebody, your attention is on receiving what they're saying without trying to respond at the same time, which is what we normally do. We get into a sort of fencing. It's more important for them to understand what I mean rather than for me to understand what they mean. So that receptive mode, and then there's a sort of change, there's a click to respond.

So all these little things, everything that we're doing in the sitting meditation, has some relevance into daily life. It's the basic attitude in which we approach every moment in our lives. And the effect is just a greater calmness, a bit more happiness around. Not so many enemies.

Just to recap: we're not trying to be self-aware. In fact, we're trying to go to a point where we're not self-aware. The guiding principles are paying attention and doing it with care, putting the heart into it, making sure the intention that we are empowering is skillful, wholesome, and that we create during the

day these moments of stillness. The more you create moments of stillness to establish that equanimity and move into the next moment, you'll see it has the effect of calming our lives. Just that moment allows us to make the right decision. Don't get caught up in the old habits of greed, hatred, fear and delusion.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated in this very lifetime, sooner rather than later.

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