

Clinging Causes Anxiety

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 15:45

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

So we're carrying on with the Buddha's words by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Now this bit here takes us into a slightly difficult realm. Remember that we are reflecting on the human condition, the tribulations of living. And this one is termed here as the anxiety due to change, but we'll see how we go anyway. Remember that when it says monks, it's standing for all listeners.

So, listeners: "I will teach you agitation through clinging and non-agitation through non-clinging. Listen and attend carefully and I shall speak." So first of all we have to understand what he means by clinging. So those of you who remember dependent origination, it's the point of identity. Very simply, you see ice cream, the desire arises, want, then the I comes in, and then get. So that's your process, mental process. The perception and the feeling arising when you see ice cream, the desire, then the identity, I want, and then I get. Now what the Buddha's talking about is the point of identity.

So we're talking about what is this I? What do we mean when I say I? That's what he means by clinging, and he's saying it causes agitation as we shall see. "Yes venerable sir," they replied. And the Blessed One said this: "How is there agitation through clinging? Here the uninstructed worldling who is not a seer of the noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their dharma, who is not a seer of superior persons, and is unskilled and undisciplined in their dharma, regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as in-self, or self as in-form." Clear? It does get a bit... you have to understand the language, you see.

So by form he's translating here what we mean by the body. It's not just the body, it's how we experience the body. So it's feelings and sensations in the body. Actually at a more basic level it's these—if you remember those four great elements described in a descriptive way as earth, water, fire and wind. What we talk about is sense of pressure, sense of gravity and all that, all the stuff around heat and lack of it, sense of fluidity, elasticity, that which conjoins like elasticity and movement. So in Buddhist psychology, in fact in ancient psychology, all our perceptions arise from that basic percept of the way we experience things. So for instance seeing would be a fire element. So anyway, he's talking about the body.

And now he says, you see, now these people who don't know, who don't know the truth from untruth, and they're undisciplined, they don't practise *dharma*—dharma means here a righteous way—they say that form as self. So in other words, I am the body. I am the body comes out most clearly to us when the doctor says you've got six weeks to live. Then you know I am the body. Why? Because the agitation arises, the fear, the despair, etc. If you didn't think you were the body, what's the problem? But it's the identity, I am

the body, which is the problem.

Now I remember I was with a friend once and we were... he said something which was about Buddhism and whatnot. And I said to him, "Well, you know, we aren't the body." And his father blurted out, "Oh yes we are!" That was it. End of conversation. He was dead in a year. So this I is a very... it's a very impermanent thing.

So that's what he means when he says form as self: I am the body. Self as possessing form: so I have a body. So we'll often say things like "I have one leg shorter than the other," as you say. So you have parts. Like "I have a big nose"—I'm not talking personally here. So I have a big nose, you have parts of your body. So we have a dual relationship to the body. We sometimes think I am the body, sometimes think well I have it.

Then there's form in self, so the self is something slightly separate and the form is within it. The body is within it. So the self is much bigger than the body but somehow the body is in it, it's part of its definition. So for instance, I am the body, I am the mind, I am feelings, etc. So there's a big self and the body is just part of it, but it's still I. So that's the point.

And then there is the self as in forms. So it's as though we think of ourselves, this little feeling of a self, which happens just an inch or so behind your forehead, doesn't it? You don't feel the self in your knee, do you? Or in your big toe? When you're looking at me now, where's the sense of self coming from? I'm looking at you. It appears, doesn't it, just behind your forehead? So the self is in form: me, I as I experience myself, I'm up here in my head inside the body. So we have all these different ways of feeling myself, of experiencing this so-called self.

Now when we identify with something—I am—there's a presumption that this is what I always am. I am the body. Now if we say I am the body, the Buddha goes on: "That body of his, that body of theirs, changes and alters. With the change and alteration of the body, their consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of the body. Agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of the body remain obsessing the mind. And because their mind is obsessed, they are frightened, distressed and anxious. And through clinging, they become agitated."

Correct? He's not telling us anything that we don't experience. I mean, you look in the mirror and there's a few more wrinkles there and you get very agitated. A few more white hairs and you get very agitated. No hair is even more terrible, it's awful. So you can imagine the terror when I was 21 and I was looking in the mirror and I saw this gleam through my hair, you see, and I thought, what the hell is that? And as I did that, I said, there's a hole! There's a hole! And my father thought it was a hoot. But it never occurred to me that I would... I'm supposed to miss a generation. I forgot my mother was bald. No, that's not true. But somehow, I always remember that moment, you see. Terrible agitation. Terrible.

So there we have this sequence. We've got the sequence of I am the body, and at various points in our

lives, we realise that this body is not what we thought it was. It's moved on. And that's what brings us this preoccupation with the body. So if you wake up in the morning and you always wake up with a bad back, that's fine. If you wake up in the morning and you've got a pain in the stomach, you get very worried, you've got to go to the doctor because you haven't had that one before. And because of this agitation, a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation...

I mean, just think of how upset you can get if your body's ill when just you wanted to go on holiday. How angry you are that you can't run as fast and you missed that bus because you stubbed your toe the other day. There's all these agitation comes up when we realise that the body has changed. It can be a change which is continual, a continual aging process, or it can be something which only lasts for so long, as when we're ill.

And so this agitation and a constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form remain obsessing the mind. And because the mind is obsessed, they are frightened, distressed and anxious. Through clinging, they become agitated. So in other words, he's saying it's the way we define ourselves that's the problem. The body isn't the problem. It's the relationship that we've developed to the body as it being me, or I am in the body, and therefore I'm supposed to control the body, or the body's in me. It doesn't matter what relationship you have to the body. I possess the body. It won't follow your command. And that's your problem. That's our problem.

So that's the body. Then he goes through the five *khandhas*. So if you remember the five aggregates, there are all those acts of perception, basic perception, all the sensations and feelings, then there's all what we call the *saṅkhāra*, which are—I'll come back to in a minute for those of you who've forgotten—volitional conditionings, and acts of cognition where we know what it is that we are experiencing.

Now the Buddha divides the human experience into these five because he wants to point us to where the suffering arises. The suffering doesn't arise in the body. Pain arises in the body, pleasure arrives in the body, not suffering. Perceptions may be unpleasant or pleasant, but it's not suffering. Feelings can be pleasant and unpleasant, but they're not actual suffering. The suffering comes about because of our relationship, and this is in our *saṅkhāra*. That's where we have developed our habits of wanting and not wanting. And cognition is neither here nor there. Cognition is just that point of knowing. Like you know you're sitting on a mat.

He says that all of these suffer from the same thing because of this clinging. So just the final one, I'll read the final one: "With the change and alteration of consciousness, their consciousness becomes preoccupied with the change of consciousness. Agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of consciousness remain obsessing their minds. And because their mind is obsessed, they become frightened, distressed and anxious. And through clinging, through identity of one sort or another, they become agitated."

So agitation there refers to all the negative mental states that arise because of this delusion about who we

are.

Then of course as usual we always get the opposite. So it is in such a way that there is agitation through clinging. Now, "And how is there non-agitation through non-clinging?" So here the instructed noble disciple who is a seer of the noble ones and is skilled and disciplined in their dharma, who is a seer of superior persons and is skilled and disciplined in their dharma, does not regard form as self—he doesn't think the body is me—or self as possessing form, I have a body, or form as in self, or as the self is in the body, in the form.

"That form, that body of theirs, changes and alters. Despite the change and alteration of that body or form, their consciousness does not become preoccupied with the change of form. There is no agitation and constellation of mental states born of preoccupation with the change of form, and it does not remain obsessing their minds. And because their mind is not obsessed, they're not frightened, distressed or anxious. And through non-clinging, not false identity, they do not become agitated."

And then he goes through all the *khandhas* again, you see. And then finally he says, "It is in such a way that there is non-agitation through non-clinging."

I can only hope that the words of the Buddha have been of some assistance and that my commentary has helped a little bit, and that you will use it to deepen your understanding about the human condition and wend your way gently to full liberation sooner rather than later.

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