

# Trois compréhensions nécessaires

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 39:49

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato  
Sammāsambuddhassa*

It's always good to review even for people who are well advanced. There are three things about which we must be completely clear. What does the Buddha mean when he speaks of right attention, right awareness, right mindfulness? How do we manage what takes us away from right attention and awareness? And what is it that we are actually trying to investigate?

To understand what right awareness is, it's good to remember things from the Buddha's life. He left his family while experiencing what we would call nowadays an existential crisis. He had become conscious of the existence of illness, ageing, and death. And so he left to find an answer to all suffering, and more particularly to the fact of being reborn continuously.

He worked with two teachers, and both taught him how to develop very beautiful mental states. We find this in all religions - with prayer, mantras, or even with the breath. If you continue to observe the breath and become absorbed in it, then this will lead you to a very peaceful mental state. You lose consciousness of everything else. It's better than having a hot bath.

So he learned this, but unfortunately, when it ended, he was still depressed and anxious. The problem was that when he came out of these states, he still felt depressed and anxious. So this didn't answer the question: Is there an end to suffering? Is there an end to the cycle of rebirths?

So he tried another method that was popular at that time. This method was based on the understanding that it was the body itself that was the problem linked to bad *kamma*. If you could leave the body totally, abandon it totally, then the soul would rise to heaven. And if you made a very strong effort not to harm any living being, then nothing would condemn you to come back down to earth.

This was the understanding of the Jains. You see Jain monks sweeping in front of them before walking. They have such awareness that when they turn in their sleep, they wake up. And they have such a level of consciousness that when they turn over when sleeping, they wake up to sweep their mattress.

So the Buddha tried this - not eating, weakening himself to the most extreme points. He was so thin that he could hold his spine through his belly. You try that - you could see how thin he was. But unfortunately it was just more suffering. So he left his companions.

We can imagine him on the roadside looking very, very depressed. It's said that a woman was passing on

the road. She had offerings to offer to local divinities - sweet things, cakes - and when she saw this poor wreck, she offered them to him, and this gave him energy again. Tiramisu!

And then a memory came to him about his childhood. There's something that seems very true to me about this particular memory, this story I'm going to tell you, this memory he had, this recollection he had.

He remembered, he recalled his father performing a ceremony for sowing, to open the sowing season. And he remembers being absorbed - the same concentration as with the other exercises, an absorption - but this time he was absorbed in what his father was doing. So this was a turning point for him in his quest. Instead of trying to find how to find happiness, he tried to see how he created his own suffering.

This gave him the inspiration to continue practicing. So he found a beautiful place beside the river, under the shade of a Bodhi tree, next to a village where he could find food. And he put grass underneath to be comfortable. And then he made a great resolution: I will not leave this seat until I have cracked this problem or I die. I will not get up from this place before resolving the problem or dying.

Fortunately for us, fortunately for him, in six hours he solved the problem. From this memory, he understood what right awareness was.

When we are children, we know nothing. So when we see a butterfly, our eyes fix on it. We live in a world of wonder. And we are so amazed by this butterfly that our lower jaw drops. And our parents think we look stupid, so they tap us on the head saying, "Wake up." And by this act, they ruin the child's chance of becoming definitively liberated.

And after the child has absorbed the butterfly, he turns to the parents and says, "What is this?" And that's a great mistake. Because then the parents say, "That's a butterfly." And the child says, "Ah, butterfly." And the next time he sees the butterfly, he doesn't look. He recognizes - it's the same thing as the butterfly I saw. He says "butterfly, butterfly." And from that moment, the child never again looks at a butterfly except through the classification, the concept of butterfly.

But of course we have to go through this stage. There's nothing you look at that you've already seen without looking at it through the story you have with that object. So when I look at a candle, I put onto the candle my image of the candle. How can I return to the child's mind to see this as if for the first time?

And the way we do this is by exercising our attention directly through the senses. That's why when we eat, we put our attention directly on the taste, on the tongue, the teeth. And when we do this, all these concepts disappear - we directly experience the thing. And this is an indication of what the Buddha means by right awareness.

The reason for using mental notes is a way of bringing the intellect down to very concrete things. It's as if there's the world in the background and attention places itself precisely on the object.

And of course, what prevents us from doing this is the mind itself and the heart - all the turbulences in the

heart. For example, you're observing the breath and suddenly you remember something that irritated you. And then you're in this magical cloud of arguing with someone. And then you wake up.

And you come back to the body, into the body. And now, instead of pushing your anger outward, you go inside the body to feel the anger in the body, in the bodily sensations. So all these emotions, all these mental states - every time we feel lost, we return to bodily sensations or to the breath. We return first to bodily sensations, and if we don't feel anything, we go to the breath.

So all these thoughts, these memories that create turbulences inside us, these are energies that are like those of a typhoon, a whirlwind. Every time this arises, you return constantly to feel how it's happening inside the body. And you try to wait until it's completely gone.

This applies to all the horrors of the human heart and mind - guilt, shame, anger, hatred, etc. The version of this is more like a siphon, and it leads us to this sweet oblivion. There's no suffering in oblivion. This is real fatigue, but here we're talking more about torpor of mind and heaviness of body - feeling the heaviness in the head, feeling the heaviness in the body. This evening we'll go into more detail with the obstacles.

So actually, when we practice, what we investigate is exactly this - the three characteristics of existence. We're not trying to do psychotherapy. The fact that the heart expresses itself in feelings is a process. It's very dear. But spiritually, it's this investigation of how we create suffering.

And there's this problem of desire. The Pali word is very difficult to translate. Obviously, a desire that comes from a sense of goodness, of good, is a desire we wish to strengthen - compassion, joy, etc. But this particular desire is based on the understanding that if I get what I want, then I'll be happy. So we try to collect many friends, much money, many vacations. Because when we do that, we feel happy.

But unfortunately, this happiness becomes dependent on friends, money, vacations. And so what happens when your money disappears, your friends hate you, and there's nowhere to go? Depression? Possible, yes, possible. Wherever our happiness is dependent on something, we can be assured suffering will arise.

So we must find somehow a more skillful relationship with life as we experience it. We can talk about this more later. What we want to catch, what we want to notice, is this desire.

Even here, you might say, "My knee hurts, I move." Why do you want to move? Because you don't want the pain. And even though this will disturb your practice, because it will disturb your concentration - even though we can move without altering our concentration - you do it anyway. But if you stay with the pain and more exactly with the desire, until the desire goes away, then this desire will leave because the pain is not unbearable. So there arises an equanimity with this sensation of pain.

So we begin to understand that every time we have things we don't like, we're going to try to find comfort to find our happiness or contentment. So we're constantly manipulating things. And on the other side,

when we want something that makes us happy, there's pleasantness. And I'll speak a bit more about this before lunch.

And the second quality is this impermanence. It's really about managing to notice the end of things. We're very good at noticing the beginning of things. For example, we're very good at noticing a new style of film, at noticing the emergence of a new movie star. We know exactly when we start this cold. But we don't know what happened to these movie stars - they disappeared. And we never see the cold end - it's just gone. We never see the end of a cold - it's just gone.

What prevents us from seeing the end of things? Why are we always ahead of ourselves, wanting to know what comes next? It's because when we see an end, we also accept, in a small way, that there is death. Every time we see an end, we accept in a small way that death exists. So each moment is a little death. And we don't like that. I don't like it. So my mind is always in the future, ahead of myself.

So by bringing ourselves back to the end of things, we become more comfortable with the idea that everything ends. Relationships end. Your partner, your husband, your wife may die before you. And there's also a moment when we're going to die. So why make such a big deal about it? Because we're dying now. Biologists tell us we have a new body every seven years. But we don't notice it. We see the changes when we want to. I've had seven new bodies. Wonderful. No, no, I've had ten actually. But I didn't notice it.

So seeing the end of things accustoms us and makes it more comfortable, the idea that at some point we're going to die.

And the third characteristic of existence is the question of identity. This is the teaching of non-self. And I'll speak about this more later. When you start a sentence by saying "I am," you always put something after. I am a woman, I am a man, I am a father, I am stupid. There's always something at the end. And the question is, to what extent is this identity real? How much?

For example, I have a headache. So someone here has a headache. But I'll say, "I am sick." So part of me possesses something and part of me is something. So we have a very confused identity with the body, full of confusion. I say, "I am the body." But do I know now what my liver is doing? No.

When you investigate your knowledge, your experience of the body, there's not much that we experience directly. All these identities - like my body, my emotions, my thoughts - to what extent are they really true, really real? So this becomes an object.

When we are born, during the first four months, it seems there is no object. It's just a shower of undifferentiated information. But I clearly have the sensation, the knowledge of something when it's pleasant or unpleasant. And then, after a while, from this mass of information, my first object arrives. And generally, it's the person who takes care of you - your mother.

Now, to make the external world completely objective and to separate myself from my mother takes me

three years. So when we're three years old, we say "I am me." And "this is mine" comes later, because indeed it comes later. With my nephews and nieces, I used to take their toy, saying "it's mine." And they looked at me with great surprise. They were very angry - "Mama, mama."

And of course this process of objectifying the external world continues. What we do is put the internal world outside so it becomes an object. So now I become conscious of sensations in the body, emotions and moods in the heart. And I can see the thoughts and images of my mind. So there's a separation of consciousness from the psycho-physical organism.

This separation helps us become aware that consciousness is of a different quality. So this process of detachment from the psychophysical organism is the process of liberation. We'll talk about this more later.

So right awareness, right attention - we begin with the child's mind, his way of looking. And every time we're caught in a story... When you get up from sitting meditation posture, you can begin to be interested in the story. You can write novels. But not when you're practicing *vipassanā*.

And then we investigate the three characteristics of existence: wrong desire, impermanence, non-self, non-me, identity.

Very well, I can only hope that my words have helped you in some way, that I haven't caused more confusion, and that through your attentive investigation, you will free yourselves from all sufferings sooner rather than later.

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