

# The Joyful Aspects of Meditation

Bhante Bodhidhamma · International Talks · 46:54

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*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa.*

Homage to the Blessed One, the Noble One, the Perfectly Enlightened One.

On the first night we introduced the technique we're using and why we use various techniques. Yesterday was all about the horrors of meditation. So today we want to balance that with the joyful aspects of meditation.

The Buddha called these the factors of enlightenment. I've heard they're also translated as wings of enlightenment. And he also spoke of five spiritual faculties. I'll try to bring these together for you.

The first thing I'd like you to understand, especially those of you who are here for the first time: you don't need to remember a single word I tell you. Because Theravāda is fortunate and unfortunate in the sense that it has many lists. Many lists. It's fortunate because everything is nicely divided into categories. But this turns into excessive logic. And you then spend too much time trying to learn it.

So to begin at the beginning, we cannot surrender to anything without confidence. Confidence is not the same as faith. Faith is something like the statement "I believe in God." It's conceptual. "I don't believe in God" is equally wrong. Confidence is trust in the heart. Trust.

In one of the texts, confidence is spoken of as a gem that purifies water. The Universal Monarch has seven gems. When an army crosses a river and the water is muddy, he puts the gem in the water and the water becomes clear. So with confidence comes clarity.

Confidence first depends on understanding. So when we first hear the Buddha's teaching, for example, we say to ourselves, "Hmm, that sounds good." And the heart begins to approach it. Then we sit and begin to see the benefit of *vipassanā* meditation. So again, the heart approaches. The heart approaches. And the heart is pleased. And all fears about life and death disappear. Even during a single sitting. Right? Hopefully.

Confidence undermines doubt. And sometimes, even though we feel we understand it, somehow it's not yet in the heart. So sometimes we must wait until the heart supports or reinforces that understanding. Sometimes the heart feels that this is right, even though we don't understand why. And when this happens to us, sometimes we make such a great leap of trust.

Whatever the issue of confidence, it doesn't concern us here because we all practice. We've already crossed the first obstacle. But doubt becomes more important as we advance on the spiritual path. Sometimes we think we're not progressing quickly enough. Sometimes it seems things are getting worse. These are moments for doubt. And sometimes we must strengthen our faith again, whether by reading or speaking with a teacher. And sometimes we must make that great leap and hope for the best. And we won't be afraid of it if we understand that in spiritual life there are no mistakes. There are only attempts and errors. When we do something wrong, we've learned something from it. Now I know what not to do. So the path is clearer. So we don't need to fear mistakes.

And faith is also sustained by knowledge. And knowledge has three levels. Knowledge that we hear and understand, as when we hear or listen to *dhamma*, as when we read a book or listen to a *dhamma* talk. Then there's deeper understanding when we speak to ourselves. When we can express *dhamma* in our own way, we have greater intellectual grasp.

And what we learn in practice serves only to direct attention in the right direction. When we bring this knowledge as a concept into our practice, we don't gain spiritual insight. So in this *vipassanā* system we basically use words to stop thinking. And then hopefully, with growing attention, we can experience things even without words. And this is our intelligence at its best development. This is pure intelligence. I'll call it intuitive intelligence. Those of you who know what I'm talking about—I'm translating *paññā* as intuitive intelligence.

This intuitive intelligence manifests through the body. We see it best expressed in athletes. When you see tennis players, they're not thinking "The ball is coming, I must do a backhand." They don't have to think, and the ball flies, "I must hit it with a backhand." It's pure intuitive reaction. But don't forget, they don't have this skill without training.

Intuitive intelligence also manifests through art. Take a pianist, for example—he doesn't say "Put your finger here and there." He just plays. But he can't do it without practice. Then it also manifests through mind, philosophy. And here the mind manifests thought immediately. And when we begin to write, we simply write.

So this intelligence is something within body, mind and heart. And what we're trying to do is draw it out and begin to experience it as pure experience. So this is the *vipassanā* process. And it's based on, or supported by, confidence.

This is also called investigation of *dhamma*. And what balances this investigation is equanimity, balance. Equanimity is a funny word—it's used in seven different ways. Sometimes it means the heart is calm. Sometimes it means you're not creating any concepts. But in our meditation it's the quality of total openness and acceptance—the ability to accept whatever comes. Whether it's painful or pleasant doesn't matter. Let it come. And in this complete openness, this intelligence can work.

And supporting this investigation must be the calming of the mind. And we can call this concentration—the ability to keep looking without wandering about all the time. And supporting this is right effort. When there's too much effort and little concentration, one becomes very restless. When there's good concentration but lack of effort, you fall asleep. But it's a strange sleep. It's this sleep where you're still sitting very calmly, very peacefully, but you're not there. You've gone away. And then you wake up and wonder "Where was I?" It's like a blackout.

So concentration and effort must be balanced. When concentration and effort are balanced, that looking is very steady—it doesn't shake, doesn't move. I don't know if you've ever observed birds of prey when they're hunting, like an eagle. But whenever I walk along the South England coast, we have these little birds called kestrels. And they hang in the air constantly. No matter how much wind, however the wind blows. And their head is absolutely still. Because they must see those tiny mice or whatever. They've made films about it. The head is absolutely still. But the wings are flapping like mad. But the head is focused on that point.

So it's the same in our meditation. The concentration energy is only focused on that looking. As for the heart, it must be engaged. And what brings the heart to that engagement is interest. When you have interest, you want to do it. And what balances interest is such calm.

From the perspective of looking, this is the calm of equanimity and that opening, acceptance. From the perspective of the heart, it's about the desire to know, which is balanced by that calm. That's why I emphasize during the day that you should be calm in your practice. Let go of all those ideas about achieving something, about some success. Breathe the air and listen to the birds. Practice a little *mettā* to develop the capacity for that calm and acceptance. And then when we sit, we awaken the intelligence. We awaken that desire to know.

Some people become focused on being concentrated. I always think that constrains us too much, tightens us. But if we place emphasis on interest, I think you'll find that concentration arises by itself. Just ask yourself: Did you ever have a problem with concentration when something interested you? Did you ever have a problem concentrating when watching a film? I never had a problem concentrating when watching a film.

So part of our practice is increasing interest. And remember, the enemy of interest is boredom. So when that interest has a certain goal of wanting something to happen, or wanting to succeed, when it doesn't work, then naturally, when it fails, we're disappointed and bored. So when you feel this disappointment creates boredom, definitely turn to that boredom as a meditation object. You must increase your interest in that boredom. You simply sit, something interests you, and suddenly boredom. Ah, that boredom, that's interesting.

So now we've talked about various qualities. We've talked about confidence as the foundation of our actions. And that's supported by understanding. And when the heart has this confidence, we begin

practice. And in practice we may find that sometimes we're too tight. If you feel this, then stop and think about it. At the end of every sitting I ask you to reflect on the sitting. But you can do this during the sitting itself. And when you say to yourself "My mind isn't calm, isn't balanced," then you should ask yourself "What should I do? I must investigate this reason for agitation. Maybe it's because I'm trying too hard."

I might be sitting very engaged and suddenly feel tired. Maybe it's one of our old good friends—dullness or lethargy. But it could also be that we're not giving enough effort. In this case we lift up interest. We must learn how to inspire ourselves.

Now you might think this is too much to remember. You might say to yourself "This is too much to remember. Does this mean after every sitting I have to go through confidence and concentration?" The Buddha's teaching made it very simple for us. What he discovered was the effect of right seeing. Right mindfulness is looking at the three characteristics of existence.

Impermanence—the fact that everything is arising and passing away. So I'm interested in the process. How do things arise and pass away? The fact of unsatisfactoriness. So how do I create dissatisfaction in myself? I'm interested in the process of wanting, not wanting. And finally, that much subtler teaching about self and not-self.

Sometimes when you sit and feel some emotion, notice the distance between the one who knows and that feeling. At least here we begin to see that the body with its sensations is not me, not mine. The pain in the knee, if I can feel it as pain over there, not here—I'm looking, feeling the pain there. If I can sense the distance, this is a beginning to understand "Oh, not me, not mine."

Suppose you're walking down the street and your arm fell off and suddenly it's on the ground. You know, "I—that's not me." Here's clear distance between the person without the arm and that arm. When we were very small children, they told me that until age four it seems we live without any objects. Everything is just me. For us adults, it's very difficult to imagine this. One moment when you can realize, experience this, is when you slam your finger in the door. That moment of pain is me and mine. Only afterward do we look at that finger and see it as something perhaps a bit separate.

And as we grow up, that "I" which was everywhere suddenly becomes there. We enter this room, for example, and have no problem. We know that window isn't me. Nor that floor. The atmosphere in the room isn't me. All we've done is turn that container inside out. The body is the building. And the mind is the atmosphere.

Whenever we're in a situation where we look at something and feel all those different components—sensations, emotions and thoughts—and distance ourselves from them, just this process is recognizing that this isn't me. And in this process we can more clearly understand what the quality of knowing is.

So this quality of knowing is called *sati* by the Buddha. Mindfulness. Open awareness. Looking. Seeing. I

forgot to bring a picture that I consider the absolutely perfect picture of *sati*. I'll bring it. We don't have good equivalents for this awareness. We have attention, awareness...

This picture was an advertisement at a railway station. I'll leave it on the table later so you can look at it better. I don't know if you can see it. Can you see it well? So you see this little face. You see the eyes—completely open. You see the mouth—completely open. When our parents see this, they smack you on the head saying "Wake up!" And thereby completely destroy our intelligence.

This relaxed little jaw tells us it's not about thinking. It tells us there's no thought there. That's why in our meditation the jaw should be relaxed. And what you also see, I think, I hope, in this picture is pure wonder at life when he achieved liberation.

This quality of awareness is key to understanding our practice. And so we should always begin with relaxing the body, raising interest and directing attention to the object and watching. When I was at a Malaysian meditation center, after meditation someone allowed me to stay in a little house on a plantation. I can't remember what kind of plantation it was. And evening was approaching when I took out a chair, so I hung a mosquito net from a branch, made myself a cup of coffee and sat waiting for sunset. But it never came. So I slowly began to realize I was looking eastward. I was disappointed.

And every evening two dogs met there and chased each other around that house. And that evening one of those dogs came earlier and began whining because the other dog hadn't come. And like this he came. Finally he came, and when he appeared around the corner, he saw the table with mosquito netting and nothing inside. And I'll describe what happened. He stopped, looked—pure intelligence. It really struck me when I saw such pure intelligence in that dog.

So this quality of awareness is in all beings. The Buddha's discovery lay in this particular quality and how to achieve liberation through it. And that's its profound simplicity. It's the absolute simplicity of it. The only thing we must do is watch, feel, experience. We don't have to think about it. It's enough—just look.

So remember, when you're confused, recall this face. So at the end of your sitting you can reflect on your practice. How did I use the technique? Was it beneficial, not beneficial? How did I react to obstacles? And how did I develop the factors of enlightenment? So you don't have to make this into a test. You mustn't take it as an examination. It's just at the end of the sitting. Simply "I just kept falling asleep. Next time I must get up faster." "That was very good concentration. How did I achieve that? Next time I must repeat this." Sometimes it helps to sit in the same posture. "Was I lazy in noting?" So, okay.

So thank you. So if you do some meditation when walking, we'll meet again.

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