

Understand and See Things as They Really Are

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

This is a favourite saying of the Buddha. But what does it actually mean? The translation of ‘things as they really are’ gives weight to experiencing in the present moment. But experiencing something can be done at all sorts of levels. Looking at a rose, I can acknowledge I see the rose and I am made happy by that feeling. But am I really seeing the rose as it is? If I want to do that I have to get back into my body, my senses and really look and smell the rose. I become aware of how red it actually is. Before it was red, but not this red. And my nose was simply not engaged. Engaging my nose gave the rose a different sense dimension. Now I am really experiencing the rose as it really is. But am I? I could go the scientific route and put it under a microscope and see all the different cells. And if we had eyes that could see the atoms and sub-atomic components, we would find out it was largely made of nothing! At any point I might say, now I see the rose as it actually is. Looking at a rose this way may be scientifically satisfying, but there is also a spiritual understanding here. That nothing has any substance. It is when we turn the gaze upon this ‘body of mine’ that it may strike home that as that rose is so is my body. This insightful reflection might not make us so happy! Going back to the Buddha’s phrase the literal translation is to ‘really grasp and see how things have come to be’. In other words, not to see the rose as a thing, but a ‘thinging’ – something that is continuously changing. To see how things have come to be naturally progresses to how things are going to be. The Buddha wants us to be aware of process and how nothing is anything, not even for a split moment. To see the rose as process is to see it bud and blossom; droop and die a shrivelled memorial. And again when we turn this understanding towards this body of mine, then it may strike home at that intuitive experiential level that this body really is in a process and it will die, most likely a shrivelled representation of itself. What was the magic of nature now becomes the tragic for me. Hardly a happiness engendering realisation! Gently repeating to ourselves – this is the way it is. Over and over. Feeling the fear, the aversion, the reluctance to accept. Putting a smile on the face. This is the way it is. I am not alone. Everything is arising and passing away – all the plants, all the animals, all humans – even this mighty cosmos. Slowly the agitation gives way to calm. In that calm, we hear the Buddha’s teaching – there is an end to suffering in the here and now. Where then can I stand in this tumultuous world and yet not tormented by it? When we know where that is, we have come to realise the experiential truth of Satipatthana – the establishment of awareness. This is what the Discourse on Mindfulness is all about and at the end of that Discourse the Buddha states that anyone who can maintain complete unbroken mindfulness for even a mere seven days will be fully liberated or reach the goal of Non-Returner. Reflecting on impermanence and insubstantiality, although at first not a pleasing contemplation, lead to realisation of what is permanent and reliable?

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