

# The Basics of Insight Meditation 03

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 16:46

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Good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, though I hope it has been happy.

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.* Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

That was a cruel ending last night. I was leading up to a crushing statement that would have changed the world. However, it will now have to be a footnote. So this evening is the end of this three-day retreat. And let's hope this machine will keep working. We have messed about with it, and the hard drive doesn't seem to be working as hard as usual. I think that's what was wrong with it. If not, I have another, I have Noreen's laptop at the ready.

So on the first night, we talked a little bit about goodwill, *mettā*. And the second night was the body care, thinking about the body, about our relationship to the body. So this evening, really, it's the turn of *vipassānā*. And I'm only reinforcing what I'm sure most of you know, but it's always good to go over basics.

The first thing is to really grasp what the Buddha means by this right awareness. I think we have to go back, you know. I do mention his moment in childhood where he's watching his father doing a plowing ceremony, and after his ascetic practices that becomes a memory which gives him some inspiration. And what he recognises was that as a child he was equally absorbed. He could very quickly go into an absorption because the heart's very pure as a child usually. But there was something extra which he had not been practicing. He had been practicing the *jhāna*, which is really about establishing very beautiful intense mental states, but there's no wisdom there. That's what he eventually discovered.

And this memory from childhood, I think, inspired him and gave him a different angle. So instead of trying to achieve happiness, I think he then sat down and wondered how he was creating suffering. There were points before that when he was investigating that, such as the time he felt fear, such as the time he realized that there were two types of thoughts. One was wholesome and one was unwholesome. That was the beginning, really, of recognising that at the root of our problems is ethics, our relationships.

And that, of course, was very novel for the time, remember, because people presume that misfortune and all the rest of it partly happened because of the gods or fate or something like that. The Buddha really wasn't into fate as such. Of course, things happen not simply because of my own personal actions, but eventually what happens within me, my own mental state, the inner world, my subjective world, is something that I'm creating. And he discovered how not only the heart could be healed, but how there was

something that actually lay beyond the body and mind.

So I always think it's good when we're a bit confused about what we mean by right awareness, just to go back to that little child. All of us will have had that moment of seeing a bug or something or a beetle and asking our parents where it is. But there will have been a moment there where, like children, their eyes fix on it and you can see they're completely absorbed, they lose—even if you talk to them, they don't hear you. They're completely absorbed in what they're looking at. And of course, the jaw drops. Remember that? Yes, they look gormless. And that tends to be a reason why your parents, you know, give you a little tap on the shoulder or in the old days, a smack across the head. I remember one woman telling me that her father used to tell her to keep her mouth shut or a fly would get in there.

The whole point of course is that with the relaxed jaw there's no thinking, there's no coming from a position from some idea, from some concept. And that's what opens up this intelligence we have, this intuitive awareness, to receiving stuff. And of course the intelligence is within the awareness, so it makes insights. Because remember what happens is the child then, having absorbed the little bug, will turn to the parent and say, you know, what is it? And mummy will say, well, that's a beetle, you see. So already the child has a photocopy, a perception of this, a percept of this little bug. And every time it sees one from now on, it's not interested in actually seeing that as an individual little creature. It's interested in naming it. And so it says, oh, there's a beetle. And mummy says, oh, very good.

So how to get back to the original mind, what Zen often calls original mind or beginner's mind. That's our problem. And of course, the noting technique in the Mahāsi tradition is meant to occupy the thinking mind. We're meant to see through the word towards the object, to the feeling of something. So we're moving off concepts, off percepts, off perception, and moving down into the visceral part of our experience, which is the body, the feelings in the body. And now the heart is expressed and felt in the body. It's not anger for instance—we often just splurt it out with bang doors and silly stuff like that. But when you sit with it, there's a completely different experience. And you're allowing the heart to, of course, clear itself.

So whenever we're lost about, well, what is this meditation about? Just go back to that child. Just watch, just feel, just experience. Of course, now this intuitive awareness has been instructed. It knows within itself what it's looking at: the cause of suffering, desire, impermanence. But you don't have to keep telling it. You don't have to keep doing it purposefully because when you do it purposefully, you're putting some idea in the way. So it is quite difficult for us just to get into that very relaxed, at ease, focused position of just watching, just feeling, just experiencing.

Now, when you get there, you see after, when you come out or when the mind shoots off or something, you come back, remind yourself: how did I get there? And reflect on the quality of that pure watching, because that's how you'll get back to it more and more easily. That's of course, so long as life doesn't become horrendous as it has been for me in the past hour, trying to get this streaming correct.

So the second thing is to begin to understand how we work with these hindrances. I won't go into that detail. There's many talks on it. And finally, seeing these three characteristics. Again, these things—there are talks, hundreds of talks about it. But what I want to talk about is this awareness, and to give some other images that help us to perceive what this awareness is.

The first thing is, and the process of meditation. So the first thing is to go back to being to the baby again. So we're told that within the first three, four months of our lives, it's just a shower of information: light, sounds, touches, feelings, tastes, and can't make head or tail of it really. But slowly out of that mass of information, your first object arises: your carer, your mother, obviously more often than not. But of course, the one thing the baby does know is what is pleasant and unpleasant. I mean, I think we're born with that.

So over the next year or more, the baby pushes out this outer world, separates from it. And so the outer world begins to manifest with its three dimensions. And it's moving away from it. It's finding itself in another position to it. And psychologically, of course, it doesn't really liberate itself from that intense connection with the mother till about three years old, something like that anyway.

So at the age of three, the little child has a very great sense of me, and with it there comes not me. So they push that outer world out and it's become not me, and this is who I am. Now, in our practice, that's all we are doing internally. We're now pushing the internal world out, as it were, into an object to observe. When we see sensations, the observer, the feeler, is observing it as an object. When we feel emotions, the observer, the feeler, the experiencer, is feeling it as an object. And so by doing so, this awareness, which has been confused in what the Buddha would call the five aggregates, the psychophysical organism, is slowly pulling itself out and making these five aggregates—the body, feelings, all perceptions, thoughts, and all our habits, and even consciousness—as an object.

So now that's, of course, very confusing because most people would say, these days anyway, that you are your consciousness. You are what you are aware of, without making that distinction between awareness and consciousness as a screen upon which everything happens.

So how do we know that the Buddha talks about it as a screen? Because even in the scriptures, the Buddha is not so—the use of words in the scriptures varies according to who he's talking to and what he's trying to say. But at the point of contact, what we have is a physical base, an object, and consciousness. So consciousness becomes the screen upon which we can see things, the screen upon which we hear things. It's a moment of cognition, you might say. I don't really know what the proper word in English is because they also have various meanings. But if you think of a screen, you see.

Now, with that in mind, I like to use the myth of Narcissus. Now, Narcissus is a beautiful young man. He looks into the pool. He falls in love with his image. He goes to embrace it and drowns. And this is normally understood to be, you know, self-love, pride, or whatever. But it works perfectly spiritually because the awareness, as it were, looks into that screen and it mirrors back its own presence. That's your first object. I

am aware. I am me. That sense of me being the awareness.

And then, as it were, through that very same screen, it falls into the world of make-believe of the mind. And in mythology, usually water is creation. So if you can imagine the awareness waking up in the morning, catching its presence in the mirror and knowing itself, and then immediately falling into the make-believe world: alarm clock, get up, go to work, et cetera, et cetera. That's happening really many times during the day.

But that distinction is extremely subtle and very difficult to actually directly experience. But it can be experienced. And there's a point in your practice when you're very, very still, very, very quiet. The body's very still, the heart's very calm, the mind is quiet. And the sense of the observer, the feel of the observer is very strong—the feel of the feeler, the experiencer. You're right there with that self-awareness. And as it were, you've almost separated out the awareness from all the stuff on the screen. And if you can just, as it were, glance back—or yes, glance back or, yeah, that's about the best I can say. Other teachers use the same. It's mainly a little Mahāyāna technique. And then ask yourself, well, what's in there? What constitutes the awareness? Do I find any sensations, any feelings? Are there any emotions or moods or any thoughts or images, you see?

And in that way, we're starting to realize this unique quality of our Buddha nature, our intuitive awareness. So that's one process. There are many ways people can have insights. They can have insights directly through seeing the process of desire. That can also be a moment of liberation. And the same with impermanence. So this is more like a moment of understanding, of clear understanding, through the process of *anattā*, not me, not mine.

So with that image, let me see the time. Oh, I'm not doing so bad. I think it's, oh yes, that's right. With that image and the image of the child and the whole idea of getting into a position of just watching, just feeling, just experiencing, then now we're clearer about the practice that we're doing.

Well, I'm afraid that's it. So I can only hope my words have been of some service, that you aren't even more confused, and that by your devotion to practice, you will be liberated sooner rather than later. So I think we can do a little bit of practice.

Very good.

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