

DHAMMA DISCUSSION

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Upul: For this discussion session, we like to use the talking stick method, actually the stick is not going to talk, the person who is holding it can ask question, actually we use this method in last year's retreat too. Joe will explain how to use the talking stick in details now.

Joe: Anyone who holds the talking stick can ask one question, if you don't have question in this round, you can pass the stick to the one sitting next to you, and wait until the next round, you can raise your question then. To facilitate an even chance, that everyone can ask question when the stick in his/her hand, please don't change your seat from this evening onwards.

Participant 1: What is nirvana, or nibanna?

Upul: It's better to pass the stick. What is nirvana, nibanna? The verbal meaning is to blow out the fire. Blow out the fire; that means there is a fire inside us, always, always firing and burning. And what we are doing in our ordinary life, we supply fuel into the fire, therefore this fire is firing without ending, and it burns, has to burn, burn ourselves.

What kind of fires are there inside us? One can be anger, anger is a fire, when there is anger, you can see how much, how much, you burn yourself because of the anger, how many relationships that anger can burn. So there is a fire, called anger. What we are doing? We are supplying fuel by thinking to increase the anger, by recalling to our past memories we are supplying fuel into this anger.

So in meditation, you know there are two kind of meditation, method one called concentration meditation, the other one called insight, or vipassina meditation.

When we practice concentration meditation, what we are doing, we are just try to reduce or try to stop supplying the fuel into this inner fire. I think I don't have to explain this technique in details, because all of you are familiar when you have an object to maintain, when you try to concentrate, you are ignoring all the other types of objects,

you are not using them to, as fuel into this inner fire.

Therefore when you practice this concentration meditation or tranquility meditation for long enough, then you feel lots of peace, you are peaceful, and you can't see any kind of inner urge, or inner struggle because the fire is now not visible.

- (i) In pre-Buddha's time, yogis practicing tranquility meditation, in caves, or in mountains, they may come to a stage that they feel their inner fire is extinguished. But upon stimulations, the fire burns again, there is ash. They don't see the core of the fire, through, or under the ashes, so the fire is not yet extinct, and
- (ii) what Buddha or Buddhism said about nirvana, exhaustion of fire.

Participant 2: When you asked us to recall an emotional event, I was calm, so I couldn't recall any. Later I thought of my dearest mother's suffering experiences, emotions popped up, so what object should I choose for this kind of meditation practice in future?

Upul: When you recall to the past emotional events, then they may not visiting you in the beginning, if you, if you are sending this invitation, again and again and again, then there is time to come, it takes some time, it takes some time, because of some important reasons. Before, before you didn't invite them, and also, actually you, what we did to them, we push them away as far as possible, we don't like them, we hate them, and therefore we try to repress them, suppress them, we try to deny them, so, that was our response towards them.

We treated them very badly, therefore, actually, now we, we break the relationship between ourself and our past emotions. They don't trust us, therefore, in the beginning; they don't believe our invitations. They may think that, again, again, this person wants to treat us very badly again, this person wants to push us away, repress us, suppress us, deny us, therefore they don't accept our invitation easily.

So we have to develop friendship again, we have to build up that friendliness again, with ourself, with our emotions, with our past painful experiences. That's why I ask you to be friendly with your emotions, especially when they come by themselves without your invitation, maybe when you are having your meals, or maybe while you are walking, suddenly they come, please accept them, please say you are welcome, and please be friendly with them.

So you ask for an object? This open invitation doesn't going to work, you better to send personal invitations to, direct to one instance. We can choose different objects, we can choose very joyful objects from the past, from our past memories, we can choose angry objects, we can choose fearful one, painful one, all kind of emotions that we are holding unconsciously. And see, and see, maybe you can first invite your joyful memory, and if it comes, please let it come, and fully open to it. So when you open, when you allow it, when you accept this positive, this pleasant and joyful visitor, then behind this joyful visitor, others may follow, they come.

Participant 3: Sometimes during the meditation sessions, I used to think what you have taught in the discussion sessions and the contents of the questions and answers, instead of paying full attention to the meditation instructions, is it a right attitude for meditation?

Upul: What we are saying now is a disturbance to you!

Participant 3: No, I enjoy your talks very much.

Upul: That's the cause, so you enjoy.

Well, as we discussed in one of the discussions, when these information occur in your mind, please, please see whether these information are important for this moment, for this job whatever you are doing at that moment, if yes, then use it, if no, they are garbage, please send them back here, under this chair.

Participant 3: Because I want to contemplate what you have taught in the teachings so that I can apply them in daily life, so I spend some time during meditation session to think about these teachings, instead of listening to your meditation instructions, am I doing it right during the retreat?

Upul: I think after all these discussions, you have free time, before the next meditation, so please use that time to contemplate and digest, don't use that meditation time, group meditation time for that.

Participant 4: I want to ask is there any other special meditation techniques, other than those mentioned by the participant who practiced during the 72 hours' stay in hospital, especially those techniques geared to overcome physical sicknesses such as pain, or

change the physical painful feeling to less painful feeling, or get quicker recovery from physical sickness?

Upul: Most kind of meditation techniques can help you, like the awareness of breathing meditation, walking meditation, listening meditation, when you pay attention to the breath, actually you can ignore a lot of things, internal and external.

Participant 4: As a beginner, which one of these techniques is more effective in reducing physical pain?

Upul: Then, then, I think, we can discuss this subject later. Because you can still learn some more techniques during this retreat, so, anyway, you can do walking meditation, or you can do awareness of the breathing meditation, also Metta meditation, so far we have learned these 3 kinds of meditation techniques, all these 3 kind of meditation techniques are helping you to reduce some psychological and mental pain.

Participant 5: When I observe the breath, I feel calm, sometimes; it's not easy to focus only on the breath. I found that some pain is the result of undesirable sitting position, all these observations on the bodily feeling and position, is my method right, only focusing on observing the breath?

Upul: Anyhow, you are fortunate to relax yourself by observing the breath, now?

Participant 5: Yes, now I can relax myself when I observe the breath.

Upul: You can, that's good. Anyway, whenever you sit for breathing meditation, no need to, there is no hurry, concentrate on the breath or to observe the breathing, just spend some time with your body, with this sitting position. When you spend some time with your body, with the sitting position, then if your sitting position is not correct, then you can adjust it, and you can re-correct it.

Please stay with your body, feel the body, feel the sitting position, feel the sensations until you can see you are now breathing clearly. Whenever the breath becomes visible, then you can watch it, watch them. Whenever the breath becomes invisible, again return to the body, feel the body, because compared to other meditation objects, the breath is so subtle. Therefore to watch the breath, we need a fine awareness. You can use your body and body sensations to refine your awareness.

Participant 6: From time to time, when I chant, meditate, I feel my heart gets softens, sometimes I feel emotional, then I cry, why, is it because I don't have mindfulness?

Upul: What is your initial aim to do all these kinds of meditation, chanting?

Participant 6: They can pacify my mind, I feel peaceful and calm after meditation.

Upul: If that is the goal of your meditation, that, may be all kind of these things are part of the process, cry, you need to go through all kind of these things to see peacefulness.

Participant 6: Actually I don't know why I like meditate, it may be karma, I just want to do it.

Upul: What are you expecting from meditation?

Participant 6: No, I don't have any expectation.

Upul: No expectation, then what's wrong with the tears when they come, if you do not expect anything else.

Participant 6: Sometimes I cry for my family members, nothing important.

Upul: Yea, then there is nothing wrong with whatever happens during meditation, if you don't have any strong expectation, so whatever happens, it's OK.

Participant 6: I want to know why I get emotional, is it because I don't have mindfulness? I think I don't have any expectation from meditation, I only know that Buddhism teaches us a way to get out of samsara.

Upul: That is your expectation, yes?

Participant 6: Yes, is it incorrect expectation?

Upul: That I can't say, anyway, to get out of the Samsara, we have to cry a lot. Because if we are not get rid of this Samsara; we have to cry more than what you are crying now.

Participant 6: Is it the main aim of Buddhism or Buddha to get out of the Samsara?

Upul: It's up to you, up to us, nobody can decide for us, even Buddha can't decide for you,

you have to decide. And what is Samsara for you?

Participant 6: I try my best to do at the present moment; I know we are in the 6 realms and in the Samsara, like the fire is still inside us, no guarantee for next life.

Upul: So, do you experience this fire?

Participant 6: Yes, the three poisons are greed, anger and ignorance. For me, anger is the most vigorous fire.

Upul: Yea, then your aim is actually to get rid of all these 3 poisons; and anger, yea; that is your aim, now?

Participant 6: No, I try my best to extinguish the 3 poisons. I think a Buddhist have to observe the 5 precepts.

Upul: When you go to the pharmacy, there are so many medicines; all are medicines in the pharmacy, no poisons there, no pharmacy sell, selling poisons. But that's true, all are medicines, no poisons, no, not even one single poison in any kind of pharmacies.

But if we take our own medicine, then whatever, whatever I take, it can be a medicine, it can cure my sickness, if you take whatever you want from the pharmacy, actually it can harm you, it can be harmful, it can be poisons even though they are medicines. Therefore you must know what your sickness is and what is the particular medicine for your particular sickness. Don't take all the medicines from this Buddhist pharmacy.

Participant 6: We are all ignorant, I don't understand myself, what is my sickness, I don't know what I can get from meditation.

Upul: Can you understand this one single meditation technique that we are learning here, forget about all, everything?

Participant 6: I am a beginner, I only try to learn, I understand the instructions but I need time to practice.

Upul: Then, then we can try to practice it, we can try to train whatever techniques that we are learning here, breathing meditation, walking, Metta, so I think at least one is, can be convenient to you, to sort of cooling this curiosity down and the question, then that one

is convenient to you, you can get it.

Participant 6: Can I choose any of the 3 techniques to practice at home randomly, or the one I think works for me best?

Upul: When you are here, you are in group sessions, you better to make some effort to follow the instructions. When you go back home, as I just said, if one is convenient to you, you can continue the technique by yourself.

Participant 7: Now I get some understanding of nirvana now, but what is wisdom, from Buddhist point of view?

Upul: Do you have any idea about wisdom, about punna?

Participant 7: To me, I am not sure, may be wisdom includes an element of understanding. i.e. if you get wisdom, you understand.

Upul: So, to understand about wisdom?

Participant 7: I heard about the 3 stages of Buddhist training, moral disciplines, concentration and then one can attain the final goal, wisdom. So I think wisdom must be very important, so I want to know what wisdom is.

Upul: According to your clarification, we can, we can control our verbal and physical behavior by practising moral life, so moral life can only control your words and your physical actions, that's all. If you want to blame to anybody, you can control that words, and also you can control, if you want to hit somebody, you can control it, in this way, you can control a lot of our verbal and physical misbehaviors. But still these defilements, or emotions, they come to your mind, moral life can't control them.

Therefore you have to do something to control your mind. You can do concentration meditation to control it, by controlling them, by repressing them, by pushing them, after some time, you can actually, make a clean mind. As I told you earlier in this discussion, pre-Buddha's time, all of these yogis, meditators, they thought that the ultimate destination for their entire spiritual life, to control the mind, and after control, you can't see any kind of dust or have any kind of dirty thoughts.

But Lord Buddha, he saw, he saw through this calm mind, all kind of defilements are there, under this concentration mind, under this tranquility mind, all of them are there, they are like, under the carpet. They are in dormant stage. They are in a deep sleep. So Buddha used one term for this stage, say Anusaya. Means sleeping inside. So we can't see them, they are sleeping, if they're asleep, how can we see them. They have to come out; they have to awake, to see them.

If somebody is behaving very aggressively, we can see his or her anger, everybody can see, and everybody can hear their anger, even the one person who is in anger. But if somebody is not blaming to anybody, not behaving aggressively, then nobody can notice that person's emotions. So if you can control them very strongly, then others can't notice your inside, your emotions. But you know, you know, anger, anger, if it comes, but I control it, I control it, if desire comes, I control it, you know, but others wouldn't know.

In the first stage, both parties can see, therefore some kind of knowledge about you that everybody knows, everybody can get it, by watching and hearing your behaviors. But in the second stage, in the second level, others, no, not possible to understand, only you, yourself. Others don't have the knowledge, only yourself have that knowledge. But when all kind of the defilements are in dormant, In sleeping mode, even you, you can't know about it.

So there are 3 kind of knowledge, first knowledge, everybody can understand; the second part, only yourself can understand; the third part, is secret for you too. Therefore you have to do some kind of surgery, or some kind of investigation to see all kind of these hibernated defilements.

So Buddha gave a very simple example for that - what is awareness, awareness means, awareness means, like a doctor, a surgeon, can see where is the problem, can see where is the cancer, that is the mindfulness' job. But that doesn't help you to cure, the diagnosis can't help, somebody has to do surgery to remove, that is wisdom's part.

So you have to do it by yourself, you can't get it from the book, or from teachers, or from friends, no, you have to do the investigations, you have to go to the bottom, to the roots of suffering, then you have to remove it. After you remove all the roots of suffering, then actually you don't have to control anything, and you don't need any treatments. So there are some other kinds of explanations for this, but I use your patterns to explain it.

Participant 8: The first thing I learned from Mr. Godwin is to cultivate Metta, with Metta, there will be no suffering for myself and for others. One method to cultivate Metta is “we are our best friends”. We used to push away suffering, thinking that it is a protection to fight against suffering, like building up hard skin over the soft skin, to make it thick and eventually numb to stimuli. In this way, we cannot feel the suffering but at the same time, there is no way to understand suffering, to investigate what suffering really is.

Learn to forgive oneself is a profound exercise, and is also a means to cultivate Metta. Forgiveness softens our hearts, it changes our mind back to its original softness, like we peel off our hardened skin from the feet, we can see the soft skin again.

Wisdom, I think there are 2 types, big wisdom and small wisdom, or we can classify it into materialistic wisdom, and mental wisdom. I trust myself and my own belief. Meditation can develop mental wisdom. We all have wisdom inside, if that understanding or thoughts can make my mind peaceful and soft; that is wisdom. But if this understanding or thoughts, no matter how they appear to be very correct and very logical, if my mind is not peaceful and my heart is hardened by them, then they are not wisdom.

Participant 9: I have practiced for many years, I am quite confident that this life is OK, but how about next life, what can I do to prepare for future lives? say 70% or 60% assurance, not 100% guarantee for next life?

Upul: What is the guarantee for next life?

Participant 9: I understand that everything happening is due to “cause and effect”, now I don’t worry about how my son is doing for his study or what will be his future, I feel relaxed now, but how can I get that ability to guarantee any future life?

Upul: Do you want next life?

Participant 9: I don’t want another next life similar to my present life, and actually I know the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to get out of life.

Upul: Forget about Buddhism, for you, so you don’t want to live like this? If you have a next life, then it should be like?

Participant 9: Like the present life, it is OK to me.

Participant 10: (wife of participant 9) I feel grateful.

Upul: Yea, so if you want to have a life like now, then you have to appreciate your present life, if you reject it, you have aversion, if you dislike it, then you can't have the same, next time. And Buddhism says very interesting things, if you want to have a same partner in next life, then both of you have to practice the same qualities this life, you have to practice all the good qualities together, then you can go this journey together. Whenever he gets up for meditation, you have to get up too.

Participant 10: I agree, we always help each other, we always support each other, I think we are happy.

Upul: We need to be happy, doing the same things together.

Participant 10: Sometimes when I am doing the meditation, reciting the mantras, I cry, out of compassion, so I wish that all my direct family members like my son and daughter, close relatives and close Dhamma friends can have a chance to practice Dhamma too.

Upul: Good. And you, a few minutes ago, you said about cause and effect, so everything happens due to this theory of cause and effect. Everything happens in accordance to cause and effect, then, what is the cause for next life?

Participant 9: The cause for another life, we are afraid of death, we are afraid of everything disappearing, so because of this strong desire for existence, we try to seize something to support our existence, therefore we want a next life.

Upul: Yea, then the cause for the next life is here, in this life, so this life is the cause for next life, today is the cause for tomorrow, so how we live today, that can be the cause for tomorrow, so we can see how is the dream, the same, tomorrow will be the same, how we live this life, next life will be the same, so whatever you want in next life, practice it in this life, this moment.

This is not a 100% guarantee, you only ask for at least 60% to 70% guarantee, this is the guarantee. How we live today, tomorrow is the projection of today, a reflection. If you want to change tomorrow, you have change today; if you want to change the next life, you have to change this life; if you want to have sweet fruit in next life, we have to plant it in this life, we have to plant it in this life. This is the guarantee. No insurance company

gives this type of guarantee. You have the option to change today, so today is the most important day. This life is the most important life.

END OF SESSION – SILENCE MEDITATION

Upul: We spoke and we heard many, many, words in different languages, now we can hear the silence, no words, and no language, therefore everybody can hear the silence, without any barriers.

(5 minutes rest in silence)

Sleep peacefully and wake up peacefully, good night!

END OF SESSION