

Getting to know you

Dhamma Talk given by Mr. Upul SIR,
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Dear spiritual friends,

As we have just paid homage to the Noble Triple Gem our minds are clear and calm now. Let us listen to the Dhamma silent with the tranquillity and calmness our minds acquired during chanting.

There are so many of you from different age groups here today from near and afar. Some have experience with the Dhamma and meditation. There may be some who are here through curiosity of the Dhamma. Let us begin this programme with that experience.

We are Buddhists. Our religion is Buddhism. We say this with a certain amount of pride. But have we ever considered whether there is a difference between Buddhism and other religions, apart from the differences in the religious literature? Is there a practical difference? Is there a difference in talking, thinking and in life patterns between the Buddhists you and the Non-Buddhist others? Let us discuss this issue. You ask this question from yourself, I will ask myself.

As Buddhists, what are we doing? What has Lord Buddha asked us to do? Buddhists and Non-Buddhists have asked this question from us on different occasions. Sometimes may have asked you as well. This is a question at conferences. Lord Buddha preached a doctrine that is exclusive to Buddhism. It is a simple teaching, which everybody can do but which we don't pay attention to.

Lord Buddha asked to: **discover you, explore you!**

Do you know who you are? Or what you are doing?
Do you know why you are born, live, get sick, get old and die someday?
During your life span you are sometimes happy and sometimes sad.
Why is your life sometimes a heaven and sometimes a hell?
Who is making your life into a heaven or a hell?

When our expectations are realised we are filled with happiness. When our hopes on passing an exam, getting a job, getting a house, money or a marriage are fulfilled how happy do we become.

These expectations start small in a corner of the mind and then start growing with the passing days. When hopes and dreams are fulfilled there is nobody who would be sad. Everybody would be happy. We think of life as a heaven in such pleasurable moments.

We all have had this experience.

When our hopes and dreams are not fulfilled we have experienced sadness. It could be hopes on exam, or a job, a marriage or a cricket match. When our hopes are shattered we all become sad and distressed.

When the dream world do not become a reality those who dreamed become sad. They suffer. They become distressed. Think of life as a hell. Being born becomes a problem and even thinks of ending life.

When our hopes are fulfilled we smile with happiness, share our happiness. In spite of experiencing happiness and unhappiness we don't try to find out

Who becomes happy?

Who becomes sad?

Lord Buddha asked to find out who is the person that becomes happy or sad. In simple terms he asked to find out who we are.

There is nothing beyond this simple teaching in Buddhism. Other religions do not give this message. Other religions ask to find out about a creator, a god or a super natural force. So there are some who search out for a god, a soul or a super natural force. Buddhism has not denied the existence of gods. Buddhism has stated that finding out about gods will not be a solution to your problems.

So, therefore find out about yourself. We like to find out about the things we see and people we meet. If there is a new arrival in our home town or village we like to find out: "Who are they? Where are they come from? Why did they come?"

If there is a new student in school other students become interested: "Which school he or she come from? What are his or her talents?"

We all have this interest in other people; not only in people but finding out about things as well. If there is a coconut shell on the ground most would turn it up out of curiosity. Most people would like to open up or explore what is closed. But this interest or curiosity is about other people. Why can't you find time to find out about you with the same interest, with the same curiosity?

A true Buddhist is someone who tries to discover "who am I?" That is the difference. Among people who try to discover gods or other super natural beings we try to discover the being who is listening and who is talking. All other discoveries are based on ignorance.

How important are your studies to your life? You learn not only to pass an exam or to get a job. You have to learn about you. You have to concentrate on you. That is very important to life.

Who am I? What I am doing? What is happening in me? Why am I angry?

We all dislike anger. But we do get angry. Anger is tiring mentally and physically.

Many things happen in life whether we are like or not.

Life is a big book. It is bigger than any books that we have ever read. You are a book, I am a book. But sometimes we have not even read the cover properly. That is unfortunate. We are faced with all problems because we have not read the book called life.

We think we know about others. But you don't even know who you are and don't even to find out. How do you expect to know someone else? Because of your ignorance of others you are surprised by some of their actions. This happens

because you have not understood the other person properly. We identify someone with the physical form. We identify ourselves the same way. Even though the physical form is important we can only get a small knowledge from it about us.

You cannot discover you or others through the physical form. We cannot discover anybody through the photo in an identity card. Physical form is external. Therefore we can go only a short distance by learning about the body. Even though the body is an external factor we always negotiate with it. If we want to be beautiful we decorate our faces, heads or bodies with clean, beautiful clothes. Then we think we are beautiful. We think of others in the same manner.

When we are angry with somebody or when we have a disagreement we sometimes attack that person's body. Actually we have the problem with his or her ideas or thoughts. But we think the problem is with the body. The problem is not with the body or part of the body, but with the mind. But we pull his or her hair, slap or hit. These actions indicate that we are always connected with the body. When we experience anger or sadness sometimes we punish our bodies. We go on hunger, go on sleepless nights, and even try to commit suicide. These actions harm the body. Kill the body. But you think these actions punish "you".

If you are thinking you are only the body that is a very narrow idea; an idea that shouldn't be in a Buddhist. We cannot learn much from a body; a simple identification but nothing beyond. We can't learn about that person's qualities or what he or she would do in the next minute by the body. Same goes for your body. When we take a photograph for an identity card etc. we would comb the hair and dress well. Why? If we are to discover ourselves we have to appear naturally. When you change your natural appearance for a photo you cannot learn about you through a photo. Why does everybody smile at the camera? We appear smiling in most photographs. Why? We like to look beautiful. We like to look happy. Even though a person may smile for a photo that person could be suffering internally; could be undergoing pain and sadness; but could be smiling because it has to be done. Can we look at a photo and say whether that person was happy or sad at that moment? We actually cannot.

There is this contradiction in us. A person who is suffering internally but smiling externally. This contradiction is there in you, in me most of the time. This contradiction is very much less in small children. As the child grows up so does the contradiction. The child grows in body, knowledge as well as this contradiction. He grows in someone who is suffering internally but who smiles externally. We have come to this stage from our childhood; internally something, externally something different. Our true nature is quite different from how we behave in society.

This struggle is called "Dukkha" in Dhamma. Even a small child has this struggle at a minimum level within him. As the child grows this struggle increases. An infant suffers from physical discomfort such as hunger, thirst, sleepiness, cold or hot weather conditions and illness. He doesn't suffer much mentally. But as he grows he starts suffering more and more mentally. We may want something but may get something else. We may want to live in a way but may be forced to live in a different way. The growth of this contradiction is called living. We have wandered far away from us. We don't know our true nature. We have forgotten. Reality is hidden from us.

Lord Buddha asked us to come back to where we were. The Noble Eightfold Path is a return trip to where we were. Other religions have a path to a god or to a heaven. As Buddhists we don't have to go anywhere. You have already travelled far away from your true nature. Now you have to come back and explore who you are.

A true Buddhist always tries to discover who he or she is and what is happening within him or her. Before attaining enlightenment the Bodhisattva underwent a period of extreme hardship in his pursuit of the Truth. No single person has suffered as much in the history of mankind. In previous lives before he has travelled a long way extending billions of years fulfilling Paramitas (requirements) for Buddha hood. He has researched for Buddha hood even before that time. No scientist has ever researched for such a long period of time.

After this long research the Lord Buddha's message to us was

“Come back to you, concentrate on your in breath and out breath”

Concentrating on the in breath and out breath is called Anapanasati (mindfulness on breathing) meditation. Lord Buddha asked you to know that you inhale or exhale at particular moment. Lord Buddha had to give this advice to us because we are unaware that we inhale or exhale. Billions of people in the world are born, live and die without being aware of their breath. Breathing in a person happens billions of times during a life span. But being unaware that this is happening is unfortunate. They don't really know that they are living. The breath comes and goes effortlessly. Thoughts come and go unaware to us. Sadness, anger, love comes to us and leaves. But we don't know. We get sick and recover but we have no proper awareness; because we are not focused in the present moment.

A small child feels hunger or thirst because it is living in the present. Since we increased the gap between our true nature and the way we should live we are unaware of what is happening. A road gets divided at a junction. After travelling step by step along one road we are so far away from the main road that we are unaware whether this is even part of that main road. Every person has travelled so far away from his or her true nature. You don't know what is happening in your mind or heart. A small child had this ability. We should have cultivated but at moment we have lost that ability.

Look back at your life and know that you are living. This is the message of the Dhamma. To know about living you have to know that you are inhaling and exhaling. This shouldn't be learnt as a doctrine nor should it be a knowledge. Come back to the simple experience of the in breath and the out breath. In spite of having friends, relations, property, belongings or jobs The only thing that stays with us until death is our breath. Even if we may lose everything else the breath doesn't leave us until death. The breath doesn't discriminate between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. Everybody breathe in and out as long as they are alive.

If he or she feels the in breath and the out breath then that person knows about being alive and can understand what is happening in life.

“Who” is inhaling? “Who” is exhaling? “Who” gets angry? “Who” feels sad? And can find answers to these questions.

After many researches the Bodhisattva came back to the breath or the Anapanasati meditation. That meditation went a long way and ended in Buddha hood. By being sensitive to the breath we can travel that far.

If we don't know what is happening in life we are not really alive. Living should be active and not passive. Lord Buddha said that there is no difference between a corpse and a person who doesn't know about being alive or about live.

Be alive. Be interested in life. We have an interest in others and what they do, about new subjects, to read newspapers or watch television. Be interested in you. Find out about you. Then you will be really alive. You will be a true Buddhist. Be alive among the living dead.

Life is not only the body: There is a mind as well. Find out what is happening in the mind. Find out whether the mind is happy or sad. Sometimes the mind may be filled with love; sometimes with hatred. Are we going to allow the mind to be angry or sad without being aware? If we allow the body to inhale and exhale without awareness then we will allow the mind to be sad or angry without awareness. But if we are aware of the body and the breath then what is happening in the mind will no longer be a secret. If we are mindful then even if the mind wanders during study a book or listening to Dhamma then we can gently bring the mind back to the point. That he or she can change life as they want.

A person who is not aware of the body follows the mind. He has no ability to go where he wants or do what he wants. He follows the mind and does what the mind wants. The body follows the mind. For example if the mind wants a dress then the body would go to a shop. If the mind wants to meet someone then the body would travel by foot or by bus to go there. Friends, this is what we have done all through our samsaric existence. The body has always followed the mind.

Buddhism doesn't talk of a journey but of a return trip. This was explained in the beginning. The mind should follow the body. We should ask the wandering mind to come back to the sitting body or to the listening body. That is called meditation. The wandering mind should be brought back to the body. The person who lives in the present is the person who tries to discover him or herself. Others live in a death past or in a unborn future. Someone who lives in a dead past is not really alive. He or she is a living dead. Likewise someone who dreams of an unborn future is not really alive. He or she is getting to be born.

The present moment is very important in Dhamma. You breathe in, breath out, eat, and walk in the present moment. You become happy or sad in the present moment. Everything happens in the present moment. The person, who is aware of what is happening in the present becomes alive; or becomes awake. He or she does not live in the dead world of the past or the unborn world of the future. He lives in the present world. Find out who you are; cultivate the interest. This question cannot be given a quick or short answer. This has to be understood.

Find out - Who you are?

- **What you are doing?**
- **What is happening?**
- **The physical or mental changes that are taking place**
- **What do you want?**

- **What don't you want?**
- **When you no longer want something find out whether that person who wanted it at first is still there?**

The person who is really alive and who is interested in life finds life a pleasurable experience and not as a hell; finds life as the most valuable laboratory in the world. Such a person doesn't waste time. Nor does he indulge in wrong activities which destroy life. He leads a meaningful life. This human life is a very valuable laboratory. It is priceless. It has a spiritual value. What can be priced can be found even if lost. But if we lose the priceless laboratory called life it is very difficult to get it again. We should make use of this **rare** and **valuable** human life.

Lord Buddha asked us to look at this valuable gift of life. Other religions look up at prayers but we Buddhists look down? You have to look down at yourself, at what you have got. When you have understood about you, you would have understood the entire world.

This life is a storehouse of knowledge; an unread book. Be a reader who reads the book of who you are. If you are that reader then your life will be illuminated. Be your own light. This is the teaching of the Dhamma. If you look at your life it will be illuminated. If you do not look at it you would live in darkness. Be determined to be your own guiding light!

