

Dhamma Desana

“Think free”

Mr. Upul Gamage, “Nisalavila” 2006

Away from our mundane things in life, today we are here to listen to the Dhamma with a tranquil and pious mind. This talk is not a distribution of knowledge nor is it to be absorbed in as knowledge. It is given to gain understanding through research and inquiry. This Dhamma Talk is not meant to be similar to one that would be preached in a classroom or at a Sunday school. It gives an opportunity to think and inquire and has to be listened to with wakefulness. It goes beyond knowledge. The result of this deep inquiry would be wisdom. The river of wisdom starts flowing from where the river of knowledge stops flowing. That river of wisdom would flow ceaselessly to the sea of liberation.

If we listen to the Dhamma with total attention our river of life would flow effortlessly to the sea of freedom. There is a difference between hearing and listening. Even a tape recorder can hear. It records what it hears. It can reproduce the sound it heard. Listening is not merely hearing like a recorder. Every word is inquired into and that Dhamma is understood deeply in listening. That Dhamma is compared to one's real life experiences. It requires a mind which is awake and which is ready to inquire.

Today I will discuss Dhamma relevant to the topic “Think free”. These two words are familiar to us. May remind us of being free from a prison. The word “free” could be used in almost every incident. Yet it is used in limited, special incidents today. Yet as children, youth or adults we always wish to or try to be free. From simple incidents to complex incidents this search of freedom is appearing. An example for simple incidents is the methods that we use to be free from mosquitoes. Merely chasing those, usage of mosquito coils or mosquito nets are used to be free from mosquitoes.

We fight throughout our lives to be free from hunger, thirst, sleep, illnesses, tiredness or natural disasters. Behind every solution that we find for our problems is our search for freedom. Look at the activities we indulge in from morning to night, throughout life. Every action is taken to be free from some problem. Consciously or unconsciously, irrespective from age, religion or nationality we always search for freedom from everything.

If we look at this from another dimension we can see that one person can restrict another's freedom. By given a specific uniform in a school children are barred from the freedom of wearing what they want. There is freedom to drive along the left side of a road. The freedom to use the right side is for the pedestrians. We cannot drive at the speed that we want. We have no freedom to act as per our wishes. A government, parents or a doctor can control our food. Our income or illnesses can have an impact as well. Somebody may have the power or the ability to put us in a prison even though there may be no wrong doing on our part. Another person has the ability to restrict, control or to take away one's freedom.

Even though somebody could restrict our actions, food or cloths, nobody could restrict our freedom of thinking. Reflect and see whether freedom of thinking can be restricted or controlled. If I want to think of yesterday nobody can forbid it with a threat of punishment. If I want to think of somebody nobody can order me to think of somebody else. We all have the ability to think what we want even though somebody may be against it. Our activities may be restricted by the sun, rain, noon or night. But freedom of thinking has no restrictions. Therefore freedom of thought has a powerful place compared to the freedom of actions or words.

Have you ever considered that you have the freedom or the ability to think freely? Nor court or an army or a government or a religion can control our freedom of thought, nobody in the entire world has the power to take away the freedom of thinking. We have the power to think free. Even though we have this freedom we have let it go. Or we have lost it. We are living with the lost of freedom of thought which couldn't be controlled by anybody, but which we have lost by ourselves. This could be understood by deep reflection. People who are merely "puppets" of somebody wouldn't understand. Only people who think

freely can understand restrictions of one's freedom, limitations of freedom, how confined is one's freedom. Nobody else can understand the lack of freedom of thought in one. Freedom of thought is not restricted by outside influence but by weakness of the inner mental power.

Examine the freedom of thought: For example try to think of the rain for five minutes. If you have the freedom of thought which couldn't be restricted or controlled by anybody else try to think of the rain for five minutes. Can you concentrate on the rain? See the outside and irrelevant facts that come to the mind. Who could concentrate on the rain? What are the reasons for the inability to think only of rain? The main obstacle is the weakness in concentration. Forgetting the rain mind starts thinking other thoughts. Then remembering the rain again mind comes back to the rain. Again the mind wanders. Because our concentration is not developed we cannot think what we want. We cannot think freely for a long time, not even for a few minutes.

Through life we are unable to think freely for at least a few minutes and we don't experience that freedom of thought. That is the truth. That is sad; lamentable; sorrowful. People are born and die without even getting to know what freedom of thought is. That is similar to being born and dying in a prison cell. When we got to hear of such people who are born and die without getting a chance to see the outside world we think of their unfortunate plight. Even though we have not yet realized, we all are born, age and die in this prison cell of "restricted freedom of thought". If we do not change this we will die as prisoners.

A main requirement for freedom of thought is concentration. To decide whether we think what we want or whether we think of things that are subjected to our five senses we need a developed concentration. We have to develop concentration or mindfulness. One of the main benefits of meditation is developing concentration or mindfulness which paves the way for the freedom of thought. There are other benefits of meditation such as being free from slavery to our own emotions. At night in the dark we may feel scared. Loneliness could turn into fear. We may feel scared when thinking of a graveyard. What happened to our freedom of thought at that moment?

Where did this fear of darkness, night or graveyard come from? That fear comes from stories we have heard or read in the past. We may have heard ghost stories from adults or read from books. If we had let go of that fear in the past moment it wouldn't have come to us now.

Our adults may have told us those stories to prevent us from going out in the dark. We are scared when hearing about ghosts at night or demons or graveyards. We are scared because our memories of the past. We have stored such stories in our minds since childhood. There is no reason to feel scared if you have not actually come in contact with ghosts. One may have heard about demons in a graveyard and felt scared in the past. When heard again that person will be scared again. Fear rises for a noise heard or a form seen in the dark. That child who got scared in the past is still very much alive within us. We live as prisoners of our emotions of the past.

We have enemies or foes because we are prisoners of fear and anger of the past. We may get angry for an incident that happened in the past. When we remember it or when someone reminds us we see that person as an enemy in the present moment. That is because past memories obstruct the free thoughts of the present. Hence it is clear that our freedom of thought is restricted. We are still prisoners of the cell of anger that we created in the past. We will be prisoners in the future as long as we are slaves of our emotions.

Are we thinking freely? No. Even though no one can control our freedom in thinking we have lost it by ourselves. That is unfortunate. Because we are not mindful in the present moment we live as prisoners of a stale, rusted or a dead past. Therefore we cannot see the beauty or feel the comfort of a free mind in the present. Because we hold on to the emotions of the past we build our own unpleasant prison cells. When we look out from a prison cell we see demons, ghosts and enemies. Can we ever be happy or free as long as we are in the prison cell?

Another benefit of meditation is to understand the past and training to live in the present moment. We train to be mindful of the in breath and the out breath of the present.

We do not concentrate on a past breath but on the new breath of the present. We learn to live in the present by the Anapanasati (mindfulness on breathing) meditation.

We have to use meditation to see, hear, and feel everything that comes as if we are experiencing them for the first time in our lives. As an example drinking a cup of tea could be a novel experience. No two teas are hundred percent similar. Therefore every tea that comes could be a new experience. Every new tea, every new tea sip could be a novel experience. As long as we are fixed on the concept of “drinking tea” we will not understand the difference between two teas or two sips of tea.

Anapanasati (mindfulness on breathing) meditation helps to be awake from moment to moment. It also helps to get away and get rid of our concepts. Each new moment we inhale a new breath. We hear, see or feel a new thing. We experience differences of breath or sensations meditation. We have to experience as each new moment or each new breath is different from the previous one. We will not feel the novelty as long as we are trapped in concepts that we have created.

We don't know why we think the way we think:

- **What are the thoughts that come?**
- **Why am “I” thinking like this?**

If “I” can't answer those questions is it “I” that is thinking?

If we don't know what we are thinking then we are prisoners of our thoughts. Ninety nine percent of our thoughts are not helpful to us. Can I honestly say “I” am thinking or “I” am thinking freely?

Lord Buddha preached to be free from prison and reach liberation. Let us practice the below mentioned facts and try to be free from these prison cells.

- **Develop mindfulness or concentration**
- **Understand the past and living in the present**
- **Try to be free from the concepts that we created**

