



Vipassana Talk

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First Session My name is Adeesha Ekanayake, and today I'm going to talk about meditation. Not any old kind of meditation, mind you; the subject of today's Dhamma talk is vipassana (or insight) meditation.

Now, we've talked *about* vipassana meditation before, but tonight I'm not hoping to do a Dhamma talk so much as a group meditation exercise thingy.¹

So the format of the service today is going to be a little different tonight. Instead of a 15 minute Dhamma talk followed by a solid session of meditation, I want to talk for 10 minutes (even though I'm actually going to end up talking for at least 15) and then we can all meditate for 5 (or 10?) minutes. After that, I, or rather all of us teachers, will try our best to answer your questions on meditation.

First, what is vipassana meditation? The answer can fill volumes. While most forms of meditation are focused on improving concentration, vipassana meditation is about increasing awareness. Keep that in mind, it's going to come up again. Vipassana is also a form of meditation that is unique to Buddhism, and the focus on being *aware* is a general characteristic of Buddhism.

I'm going to move on, because today I want to talk about *how to practice vipassana*, and not about what vipassana is.

So, how do we practice vipassana?

- To begin, take a few deep breaths, and usually, I would recommend a bit of concentration or metta meditation, but today we all have already had a session of (I presume) concentration meditation. So I will assume that your minds are calm and concentrated enough to try insight meditation.
- Now sit in the position you are accustomed to meditate in, and begin by focusing on the breath. As each breath is taken in, be aware of it. As you breathe out, be aware.
- Does this sound suspiciously familiar? It should! Thus far, the practice is identical to that of concentration meditation.
- Now comes the point of divergence: As you meditate, a thought arises. To figure out what comes next, we need to know the goal of insight meditation. In concentration meditation, the goal is, predictably, concentration. However, in insight meditation we strive for *awareness*.
 - When practicing concentration meditation, your mind should be like a pendulum. The weight starts from the centre, just like your mind starts from a place of concentrated awareness, and swings out to the right as a thought arises. As your conscious awareness (the part of you that is doing the meditating) notices this thought, it pushes out the thought, and forces your awareness back to the place of concentration. So when practicing concentration meditation, your mind is like the force of gravity acting on a pendulum. Now as another thought arises, your mind moves again, just as the pendulum swings out to the left. Your mind, like the force of gravity, pushes out the errant thought and returns your focus to the breath(or other object), and this keeps on happening.
 - In contrast, when practicing insight meditation, your mind is like a cave, and you are like a cave diver exploring that cave.² Now the cave is vast and mysterious, and your task is to explore it and learn about it.

¹Yes, I want to use the word thingy

²Sort of inspired by Dhp. 37

- So, the thought arises, and you become aware of it. Now, instead of casting it out, you can take a moment and focus on it. Try to explore it and find out where it comes from.
- Now a cave diver, when exploring, has to return to the mouth of the cave fairly often, so as not to get lost. When practicing vipassana, there is a similar danger - if you follow a thought too deeply, you will get stuck in that train of thoughts and your practice will be unproductive. Therefore, you must take care not to get stuck on a train of thought, and once you identify and examine a thought, you must return to your breathing.
- Now an important goal is to identify your thoughts before you act on them. The simplest way to explain this is to talk about pain. As you are seated in your meditation pose, in time your legs start hurting. As you begin to feel pain, the natural impulse is to move without thinking. In a normal context, this is a perfectly acceptable thing. However, we are trying to gain awareness and insight about our mind and body, so that won't do. Instead, we must become aware of the impulse to move before we act on it. Now whether or not you should move is another matter entirely. For now, move only if you have to. If you can, as Ron said two weeks ago, just try and focus on the pain and examine it. Try and find out what exactly pain feels like. When you concentrate on the spot you think it comes from, the nature of the pain might be different from what you expect.
- As you become aware of different forms of thoughts, some masters encourage you to mentally verbalize the idea. For example, if you feel pain, you think *pain, pain* to yourself. If you feel like extending your hand, you think *extending, extending* to yourself. In my understanding, it is best if you don't verbalise; I've been taught that the words can distract you from the actual experience.

One last thing: Before you try insight meditation, I'd like you to have the mindset of a first time cave diver, who has no idea what he is going to go through. This lack of preconceptions is really useful, because the preconceptions definitely get in the way of good meditation!

Hopefully, I was able to mention all that within 10 minutes. Let's jump in!

2nd Session Field questions about vipassana (Will need Ron and Chris to pitch in!)