

The Benefits of Atammayatā

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In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhādāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we will discuss the benefits of a thing called *atammayatā*. This thing is strange to your ears, you don't know yet what it is, so please listen carefully and pay good attention so that you will learn what this thing is about.

When we know this thing, laughter and crying won't be able to affect us. Laughter is something that we can do if it is necessary, but generally it's just a kind of lunacy. Crying is something we could do if we need to, but usually it's just a play or a show. These things need not disturb or touch the mind. They in themselves have their own conditions, their own causes. If we understand their causes, these actions, these activities can be produced, but still they need not concern the mind itself; so we should understand the causes of these actions.

Both laughter and crying are actions that depend on their own particular causes. The same is true with happiness and suffering. Happiness and suffering arise due to certain conditions, and without those conditions, they don't occur. So we can't just make ourselves laugh or cry, be happy or suffer, by forcing ourselves. Instead we have to bring about the proper conditions for these things. Therefore it is necessary to understand the causes and conditions of such things.

For the common person, in certain situations they can't help but laugh – they just laugh without being able to control themselves, and in other situations they can't help but cry – the crying just happens without their ability to control. The ordinary person laughs and cries without any self-restraint. This is because they are not able to endure the conditions which lead to laughter and crying, so when these conditions come about, they react without controlling themselves.

But if we can restrain ourselves so that in laughable situations we refrain from laughing, and in crying situations we refrain from crying, if we endure these conditions, if we can live through these conditions with this kind of restraint – and you understand what we mean here – then you will know the meaning of the word *atammayatā* or you will know the benefits of *atammayatā*.

For the common person, when a certain kind of sense-object comes by, they automatically laugh, and when another kind of sense-object comes by, they automatically cry. These conditions automatically stir up, or naturally for them stir up crying and laughter, and there is nothing we can do to help such people. But if we understand these causes and conditions of laughter and crying, and if we are able to control the mind so it does not blindly react to these conditions, so that it is not affected by these conditions, then their minds won't have to suffer through these conditions. This mind won't need to laugh or cry, instead it will be cool, calm, and clear. This is the kind of knowledge we need to have and then learn how to use it. If we have this correct sort of knowledge, then we would be able to live through life without being affected or confused or disturbed by all these various conditions.

To understand what we are talking about, you need to know the Pāli word *paccaya* – or in Thai, *patchai*. We can usually translate it as 'condition.' *Paccaya* means 'a condition or a factor that leads to, that causes the occurrence of another thing.' A *paccaya* is one thing which causes the occurrence or the arising of another thing. There are two basic kinds of *paccayas* – one is the external kind, the *paccayas* that are associated with the eyes-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, and body-sense; and there is the internal kind of *paccayas*. The external kind of conditions can concoct the mind, they can stir up the mind, cook up the mind, and with the internal conditions such as craving, attachment, conceit, egoism, selfishness, and ignorance or defilement, these internal conditions go along with those external conditions to cook up the mind, concoct the mind, stir up the mind. If we are able to control these *paccayas* or actually to control the mind so that the *paccayas* are not able to stir it up and concoct it, then this – in knowing how to do that we will know what *atammayatā* is – no longer being cooked up by conditions, both external and internal, this is the meaning of *atammayatā*.

The meaning of the word *atammayatā* is the kind of knowledge where we, the mind won't be concocted by any *paccayas* ever again. *Atammayatā* is the knowledge that to not be concocted, not be conditioned, not be cooked up by that *paccaya*, that condition, ever again. When the mind has this knowledge, that will protect it in this way. Then the mind knows *atammayatā*. Think about this,

what kind of benefits there are in this knowledge of atammayatā.

The ordinary life of just about everyone, even if we have studied at university, is a life that has no knowledge, no understanding of atammayatā. And so these ordinary common lives that don't know about atammayatā are always able to be stirred up, to be concocted by any condition that comes by. This is the result of not understanding atammayatā.

Even more weird than this is that, not only does modern education lack the knowledge of atammayatā, in fact, because of modern education, there is more concocting, conditioning, and cooking up of the mind than ever before. Not only is atammayatā lacking, but for this reason, because there is no atammayatā and more and more of its opposite, there is much more pain and suffering in people's lives. People's minds are always being concocted in all kinds of strange and fascinating ways; and so if this continues, there is no way that people will be able to find peace through modern education.

So now what we like to do is consider and discriminate between various kinds of concocting and then the various results of these different kinds of concocting. We don't think that this would be at all a waste of time to consider these various items.

For example, love – what kind of complications and troubles does it stir up for the mind?

And then all the different kinds of anger – what are the myriad problems and troubles that this creates for the mind?

Hatred and its various forms – how much trouble and pain does it cause for the mind?

And then fear, whether the really stupid fear that has no reason or even the ordinary fear – what sort of problems and difficulties does this do to the mind?

And then excitement – which is really funny how much people are interested in getting excited, they like to go watch sport and football and all kinds of things, just to get excited. How much difficulty and trouble does this excitement make for the mind?

And then worries about things that have not come yet. How much does this disturb the mind?

And then longing for things, reminiscing about things that have passed away. Laying sleepless at night, crying about the things that we have lost. What kind of pain and suffering does this bring to the mind?

And then what about envy – all the problems that are created, because so many people are envious of others. All the trouble and strife and conflict that is caused by envy, what kind of hassles does this bring?

And then ordinary possessiveness and worrying about things that we possess, and that particular kind of jealous possessiveness like married people feel towards their spouses. What kind of trouble and conflict does this cause in the heart?

And if we think back over all these examples that we have just listed and all the troubles that each of them cause, all the disturbances and hassles they make for the heart-mind, if we were free of all of these things and their effects, then what kind of peacefulness, how much calmness and tranquility would there be in the heart?

The thing that in various religions is called salvation.*¹ In Buddhism the meaning of this word ‘salvation’ is very simple. It means to be free from, to be saved from the torment of all these things that we have just mentioned.

The kind of knowledge and cleverness that we gain through modern education isn’t able to control or restrain these various things which trouble the mind. Not only that, modern education often makes us clever and skilful in ways that increase the damage that is done by these various things. We learn very clever ways of thinking and then we think on and on and on, which stir up all these various concoctions of the mind. And so instead of living with just a bit of suffering, we live with a lot of suffering, because we are so clever, we are so highly educated.

And what about being wealthy, being rich, being successful in our work and accumulating wealth, so that now most of us are relatively rich, especially compared to the past? And all these riches, what good do they do us – do they help us to control all these harmful concoctions? Do they help us to get free of suffering? It’s impossible that all our wealth, that our riches will be able to save us from the pain and misery we inflict on ourselves with these various concoctions and their affects.

You might think that if we are rich then we could buy whatever we want. But where are you going to buy the means to quench *dukkha*? Where are you going to buy the knowledge that will allow you to free yourself from *dukkha*? In fact, all this wealth creates just more and more craving, more thirst and more hunger, which creates more and more *dukkha* in its wake. And all this wealth does not give us the means to free ourselves from that suffering, it just creates

¹ * = words said in English by Ajahn Buddhadasa

and increases it. So to pin our hopes on wealth, on riches is a very foolish proposition.

And then what about this thing called civilization – which for the world nowadays means merely material progress, material development? This so-called civilization which is only concerned with increasing material *paccayas* – where can you find that it really helps to eliminate suffering? All this material progress – where can you find it actually ending suffering? If you actually look at it honestly – which should be very easy for all of you since you come from Europe or America and the so-called civilized countries – it should be very easy for you to see if it is actually eliminating and quenching any suffering or if, in fact, it is merely causing more and more problems, more and more misery, more and more pain within our hearts and minds. This emphasis, this blind attachment to material progress and at the same time ignoring the mind and the heart. Take a good look at it and see if you can actually find it doing anything besides causing more problems, more trouble for our minds.

Back in the days when there was not all this civilization and progress, people used to kill each other quite a bit. Nowadays that we have got civilization, people are killing themselves quite a bit. You ought to think about this one.

Back when there was not much civilization, there were not many problems. There were problems but people could find a way out, could find a way of dealing with the problems; but now that we are civilized, we have got so many problems, so many difficulties, and so much suffering that we can't find the way to cope with it all. And so when we can't cope with it, the escape we choose is to kill ourselves. Just to be rich and have a lot of material possessions does not help solve the problem. It just causes more hunger, more thirst and increases our misery, and so we just kill ourselves, that's the only way that people find to deal with the situation. This is the gift of all this civilization and progress. The gift of this civilization is suicide.

These people who commit suicide are spiritually crazy – they are spiritual lunatics. They kill themselves because they have got too much love, too much hate, too much lust, too much anger, too much fear, too much excitement, too much envy, too much jealousy, too much worry. They have got way too much of all these things and so they are spiritually crazy. And they are so crazy that they get their satisfaction out of killing themselves.

This cleverness and the smarts that we honor so much nowadays, this is something that ends up getting crazier and crazier. This cleverness that is so

important to people nowadays, this cleverness that they teach us in the schools and universities is the kind that ends up crazy. It does not really have an outlet, it does not really lead anywhere, and then once it reaches its dead-end or gets backed into a corner, then it just goes crazy and the result is often suicide; or even if the so-called intelligence of modern men. It's really the same thing and just ends up being a bunch of lunacy, because it is unable to help us with the important things.

This may sound strange to you that intelligence can be wrong. This is something that people have not even thought up, which is quite a sad thing. People have not realized that there can both be correct intelligence and wrong intelligence; there can be wise intelligence and crazy, insane intelligence. We can use all this knowledge and learning and intellectual ability that is developed, both in a useful, productive way, or we can use it in harmful, selfish ways. So you see very intelligent people who use their knowledge and intelligence to commit all kinds of crimes, to oppress other people and do all kinds of disgusting things; or intelligence can also be used to realize enlightenment, to become a perfected human being. Intelligence can go either way – correctly or ignorantly. So we should learn what kind of intelligence is correct and be particularly interested in that kind and forget about all this intelligence which just makes us crazy, which just increases and multiplies all the various *paccayas*, the various conditions which bring us suffering.

Even the thing called religion is something that can go either way. Not very long ago there were stories in the newspapers about a group, the Temple Church or something, where because of their beliefs and various conditions they went and killed each other, hundreds of them drank cyanide Kool-Aid and committed suicide. This is what happens with so-called intelligence, even in the form of religion, this intelligence can go astray, can get further and further engrossed in things which just make us crazier and crazier. So even with the thing called religion we need to be very careful, to make sure it is a kind of intelligence that is of real benefit. *Atammayatā* can help us to avoid this kind of intelligence which just makes us crazy.

Let's go back to talk about civilization* again. This civilization that we have got, it does not stop producing the conditions for suffering. It has not ended this proliferation of the causes of misery; instead it just creates more and more of them, manufacturing and producing more and more causes and conditions and *paccayas* for pain, misery and *dukkha*. So obviously we can't rely on this civilization, it's not going to help us to stop the conditions for *dukkha*, because

it just creates more and more of them. So there is no way that we can depend on civilization.

No matter if we get to the pinnacle, the highest level of civilization, no matter how high we go, we won't be able to enter the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God can't be reached by someone who is living on the highest level of civilization. The higher and higher it gets, the more impossible it is to realize the Kingdom of God.

Those of you who follow a religion that believes in a creator-God of some sort – this civilization or this material progress that we have nowadays, there is no way that this civilization can bring us to a true experience of God. There is no way that we can realize the kingdom of God through all this material progress, and this is even more true for those religions that don't have such a thing as a creator-God, for the evolutionist religions rather than theistic religions, the evolutionist religions like Buddhism. These, it's even more clear, that this civilization, this material progress won't help us to realize the supreme reward in life, the supreme goal. Instead, all this material progress just takes us further and further away from the purpose and meanings of our lives. So when it comes to religious or spiritual matters this civilization is just about worthless, in fact it gets in our way more than anything else.

You ought to know that the highest kind of person in Buddhism, the highest level a person can reach is that of the Arahant – the worthy one or the perfected human being. The Arahant is a being whose mind cannot be touched or concocted by any conditions, it's above all these various concoctions and conditions that we have talked about and so it remains un-concocted, unconditioned by all these things. This is the highest perfection of the human heart.

The highest kind of person or the highest kind of individual is the Arahant, and the highest Dhamma, the highest level of nature, is Nibbāna. Nibbāna is the condition – or state of the mind – of which the mind knows or realizes when nothing is concocting the mind. When nothing is cooking up, stirring up, concocting the mind, that mind is cool, it's absolutely peaceful, calm, quiet, still – it has no problems, no troubles, nothing disturbs it or darkens it. This is the mind that is absolutely free from *dukkha*. This state where there is no concocting of the mind, no conditioning of the mind, this is the highest thing, the thing that we call Nibbāna.

The ordinary common trickster, the ordinary human being is one whose mind is constantly being cooked up and stirred up by various causes and

conditions. The ordinary trickster's mind is full of all this concocting. A slightly and then a somewhat better level of humanity are those where the attachment to things is significantly lessened and so there is only a little of this concocting remaining, where the mind is only somewhat stirred up by causes and conditions. And then the highest level of humanity or perfected humanity is that of Arahant, where nothing is stirring up the mind, nothing concocts the mind – the mind is completely above all these causes and conditions which create so much habit in the mind of the ordinary trickster who we see running around all over the place.

As for these common tricksters, the women in the street,* the men in the road,* most of them, their minds are just about full of craziness. You can take a look for yourself and see to what extent their lives are just full of craziness, running here, running there, constantly running back and forth, their minds being stimulated by all kinds of thing, always running, never able to stop and relax and take a true rest. They only rest, when they are too exhausted to keep running. These are ordinary tricksters whose minds are constantly being stimulated by all kinds of strange and wonderful conditions, which we proliferate in this world and so their minds are always cooking up, all these kinds of different things and so they get lost in all these conditions and concoctions of their minds. When this is the situation, if you look, you wonder whether how much humanity is really there. The word 'human being' in Pāli is *manut saisa*, [??] which literally means 'lofty-minded' or 'high-minded' – to have a mind, a heart that is above all these troubles, problems and conditions. If we see these people running around trapped within these conditions, then you have to wonder how much humanity is really there in these ordinary, stimulated lives. But then if we can understand this point and begin to get free of all this concocting of the mind, then it is possible to go up a level, or a few levels or many levels and become more and more human to increase our humanness by more and more having a mind that is free of all these conditions which keep the ordinary person constantly running.

Now let's look how this all is related to the practice of *ānāpānasati*. If you are successful in your practice of the first stage of *ānāpānasati* – that is the first four steps which are concerned with the body, where you study the breathing, the kinds of breathing, their effects on the body and then learn to calm that breathing and calm the body thereby – in being successful at this, then you will develop quite a bit of mental power and a very high efficiency in our ability to raise the mind above all these, over the power of all these conditions to concoct it. Full successful in practicing just this first stage of mindfulness with breathing, the mind has quite a bit of ability and strength in which to climb out

of all this conditioning and concocting.

If you are successful in the second stage of *ānāpānasati* – that is the four steps concerned with *vedanās* (the feelings) – then we will be able to control all feelings so that they can no longer concoct the mind. These feelings are very important, because normally when the mind makes contact with ordinary conditions, then it reacts to these with feelings – sometimes positive feelings, sometimes negative feelings and other times in between or uncertain feelings; and because of the powers of these feelings, sometimes the mind becomes stupid in a positive way and other times it is a negative kind of stupidity. But whatever these feelings are always pulling the mind off into foolishness and into craving, attachment and suffering. These feelings allow conditions to concoct the mind in very powerful ways. And if we do not understand this, then we will always be a slave to these feelings and to the conditions which lead to them. So this points to the importance of understanding the feelings and getting them under control, which is what we will be able to do, if we are successful in practicing the second stage of *ānāpānasati*.

If we consider this in the most detailed way, on the most profound, the deepest, the most subtle level, then we will see that every problem that exists in this human world has the *vedanās* (feelings) as their cause. All the problems that we human beings experience have *vedanās* at their root. This is because human beings have no ability to control these feelings and so allow them to concoct the mind in all kinds of different ways, leading to all kinds of greed, anger, delusion, all kinds of selfishness and suffering. If we understand this point, if we look very carefully, then we will see the imperative to understand the *vedanās* and be able to control them so they can no longer concoct the mind. If all of the humanity were able to do so, if all human beings could control the *vedanās*, then all our problems would cease.

Remember that when we use this word ‘feelings,’ we do not mean the emotions – we are talking about the much more subtle mental activity that in Pāli is known as *vedanās*. And these feelings, we ask that you remember, we beg, we plead that you remember this one sentence about the *vedanās*, “If you can control the *vedanās* you can control the whole universe.” ‘If you can control the *vedanās* (feelings) you can control the entire universe.” It’s a short sentence, you ought to be able to remember it.

Then one more sentence, but first let us assure you that we are not trying to tease you about your own religion or make fun of your God or whatever, but if we can control the *vedanās* then we will be out from under the control of God. If we can control the *vedanās*, then we will be free of the control of God. We are

not trying to make fun of anything, but this is a fact which you ought to know.

Let's stress we are not trying to insult or to make fun of, or belittle any God or any religion that believes in a God or any person who has such beliefs. We are not making fun of anything, but it is a truth or fact that we feel is our duty to inform you. We are not making fun of anyone's beliefs, we are just trying to state the facts.

Now we are all slaves to these feelings (*vedanās*). We do all kinds of things in order to get the *vedanās* we like, that we want, and we do a whole bunch of other things trying to get rid of and avoid the *vedanās* that we don't like, that are unpleasant for us. Because the *vedanās* have the power to make us do so many different things, the fact that our lives are just a bunch of running after certain *vedanās* and running away from other *vedanās* – this shows very clearly that our lives are just slavery to these *vedanās*. The meaning of slavery here is that these feelings are able to concoct the mind, they have this power to concoct the mind and we are unable to control it. This is the importance of raising the mind above the power of these feelings to not concoct it anymore.

The next is the third stage or tetrad of mindfulness with breathing which in Pāli is known as *cittānupassanā* (the contemplation of the mind, of the heart). In practicing this stage of *ānāpānasati*, the mind is able to, we are able to have the mind completely under control, so that the mind is no longer concocted in any way. Having the mind under control means that it is always in a state that is proper, is correct, where nothing is stirring it up or conditioning it in any way. This is the benefit of practicing the third stage of *ānāpānasati* successfully.

When we can do this then the mind is pure, it's spotless, it's free of the power of anything to condition it. Anything positive or negative that comes by can be refused, can be negated by this mind. Although this mind still lives, it is still a living mind, it is completely free of the power of all these things, of all these many positive and negative conditions to concoct it. This is the mind that is liberated. Through success in practicing the third stage in *ānāpānasati*, this very excellent thing can be achieved, this liberation of the mind.

And then the fourth stage of *ānāpānasati* is called *dharmānupassanā* (the contemplation of *dhammas*). Here *dhammas* means 'all things.' 'All things' includes both the ordinary positive and negative things and then also that which transcends the positive and the negative. This is the Dhamma which is contemplated and then understood in this fourth stage. When this is understood, when all things, when all conditioned and unconditioned things are understood, then we know that there is nothing anywhere or ever could be anything which

we can attach to and cling to as ‘I’ or ‘mine.’ There is absolutely nothing that can be regarded as ‘I’ or ‘mine,’ as ‘me’ or ‘myself.’ And with this understanding regarding everything, when the mind is absolutely clear on this point, then atammayatā is complete and perfect. This knowledge of atammayatā will be perfected through this fourth stage of ānāpānasati. This is the specialness or excellence of this stage of our practice.

So in summary all four stages of ānāpānasati are a tool for us to realize the completion, the perfection of atammayatā. These four stages of mindfulness with breathing practice will allow our mental life, our spiritual life to be completely free of the power of anything to concoct it, and then there is the knowledge of atammayatā to not be concocted by any condition ever again. This non-concoctability of the mind can be realized using *ānāpānasati* as a tool. So this is the benefit of *atammayatā*, non-concoctability, and on this we will end today’s lecture.

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