

Benefit of Retreating (Ending Insanity)

by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu

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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).

On this final day we'll talk about the benefits and fruits of making a meditation retreat.

In brief we can call this 'knowledge of transcendent matters which can solve problems in ordinary life' – knowledge about *lokuttara dhamma*, the Dhamma that leads beyond the world.

The problems of ordinary lives can be summarized in three words. In Thai we call them the 'three *gor*': *gin*, *gām*, *giat*. And in English the 'three f's': food, flesh, and fame. These are all the problems that happen to us and cause us trouble in the world.

These problems happen every day to everyone, from the beggars living under the bridges to the angels living in paradise.

The beggars always have the problem of what to eat and wanting to eat better and better than before. And then hoping for pleasures of the flesh as much as they can come by them. And then seeking for fame, at least as much fame as a beggar can get, to have a higher status or better than at least the other beggars.

Then on a little higher level, the laborers, the ordinary peasants, and the farmers; and then the merchants, the civil servants, the businessmen, and the professionals; and then the more powerful sectors of society, people with influence and power. All of these are aiming for food, flesh, and fame on higher

and more refined levels; all the way up to the so-called ‘divine beings,’ or ‘celestial beings,’ or ‘angels,’ or ‘gods,’ or whatever we wish to call them in paradise. They have these three things as the basic problem of daily life; even the angels in heaven.

They want to eat food that is always more expensive, more rare, more hard to find. People overdo this to the degree that there are all kinds of diseases due to eating improperly. Then as for sensuality and sex, people are trying to get this in all kinds of different ways to the degree that drug addiction, alcohol addiction are serious problems around the world and we have different kinds of diseases now, even the very dangerous one of AIDS. And then because of fame and honor people are unable to be humble to each other, or to really respect each other, or to give in to each other, so we have all kinds of fights and wars around the world because of fame and honor. Every day these things are causing problems for all levels of sentient beings.

Some of you might be wondering, ‘does this apply also to beings that are of less development than people?’ This is something we ought to examine.

This dog’s name is Duk and he is quite old now. In the past he would eat just a plain plate of rice, he didn’t have to have anything added to it, he was happy to accept just a plate of rice. But now there has got to be meat with it; and only certain kinds of meat. He’ll choose and won’t eat certain kinds of meat. So now he’s got problems with food. And then there are days where he’s got big problems with the flesh and he won’t eat. There are days when he won’t eat at all and becomes very thin, because he is busy chasing after female dogs. And then he also has problems with fame. If any other dog tries to sit in this place he’ll get very upset and try and chase it away. So even Duk here has problems with food, flesh, and fame.

In the past you didn’t have call him, he would come by on his own; but now you have to call him and he just sits there, and you have to actually hand him the food. So he’s got problems about fame and honor and status, and he’s become very lazy these days.

Then there is another one named Nogar, who is still quite young and so he doesn’t have any of these problems yet.

So we have to say that these problems about food, flesh, and fame exist from ordinary common animals all the way up to divine beings, the *devas* in heaven.

So we now must ask the question, ‘what is going to solve this problem of food, flesh, and fame in daily life?’

For the external side of this, as far as material physical things, then we can say that one’s wife, one’s friends – such as one’s doctor, can help us to solve the material aspect of these problems, they can help us to deal with the external side of it. But when it comes to our feelings and awareness inside there isn’t any friend in the world who can help us. There isn’t any human friend at least who can help us. The only thing that can help us with food, fame, and flesh as an inner problem... the only thing that can help is Dhamma.

When we’re talking about defilements inside of us there’s no human friend that can help us. There aren’t any angels or heavenly beings anywhere that can help us deal with inner defilements. There is no object, or thing, or place that is holy or sacred which can help us deal with inner defilements. The only thing that can help is Dhamma that is appropriate for the specific situation and problem. Dhamma that is on the proper level, which we call *lokuttara dhamma* – Dhamma that leads beyond the world, Dhamma that takes us above the world and frees us from the world.

Good friends, a good doctor and so on can only help with some of the external problems; but they can only help with some of them, they will never be able to solve them all. Only Dhamma can solve all the problems; that is if it is Dhamma on the highest level, the *lokuttara dhamma*, which we’re speaking about.

If you are successful in your study of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and successful in your practice of *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness with breathing meditation) then you will have this kind of dhamma which can solve all problems – outer as well as inner.

We’ve already said that the fruit of understanding dependent origination and mindfulness with breathing lead to us having the highest *dhamma* – the dhamma that we call *atammayatā*. We have already discussed this with you a bit but we need to enliven your memory a bit.

The meaning of *atammayatā* is ‘secure.’ The mind that is so still and secure that nothing can come and concoct it; that nothing can stir it up or cook it up. This security of mind, this perfect security of mind is the essential meaning of *atammayatā*.

We can call this in the ordinary language of ordinary people ‘spiritual equilibrium’ – maybe ‘spiritual balance’ would also work. It’s where the mind has an equilibrium or balance, where it won’t be pulled off into the positive or into the negative. With this secure balance it can’t be influenced, or affected, or concocted in any way.

We’d like to stress this secure balance of atammayatā. Remember that even the great mountains of world, the Himalayas in Asia, the Alps in Europe, and the Rockies in America, that these can still shake and tremble when there are seismic tremors or earthquakes, but atammayatā won’t shake, or waver, or move at all, no matter how much the earth shakes.

We want to stress the unshakeableness, the firmness, the stableness of the mind with atammayatā. We want even children to understand this. That the beautiful young woman with atammayatā can’t be picked up or deceived by even the most smooth ladies man; or that the handsome young man with atammayatā won’t have his head turned by even a herd of Miss Universes or other beauty queens.

But now a bottle of beer or whisky can drag their mind off. Or gambling, or night club bars, massage parlors can turn somebody’s head and drag them away; this is because no-one has atammayatā.

Things can grab us in the wickedness we already have and drag us off into some other form of wickedness, and then from there to another one, around endlessly. This is the mind that is unstable. This is the mind that is shaking and trembling, that can be pulled off anywhere. It has no balance, no security because it lacks atammayatā.

Atammayatā will help us cut through all problems of positivism & negativism. Any sense of positive & negative, all this is just arising through the flow of *idappaccayatā* (conditionality) or *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). The positive & the negative are equally just this flow of dependent origination. There isn’t really any dualism in these things, this opposition between positive & negative doesn’t really exist. All things are just this flow of dependent origination.

If you look at all the pairs of opposites, such as: good & bad, winning & losing, profit & debt, advantage & disadvantage, and so on. If you don’t have atammayatā you’ll see all these things as opposites; but if you have atammayatā you’ll see that they’re all equally the flow of conditionality, of dependent

origination.

The Jews of thousands of years ago taught this matter of being free of the positive & negative, of being above the positive & negative. Taoism for more than a few thousand years has taught to be beyond *yin & yang*, to be above *yin & yang*, which is the positive & the negative. In India the Hindus have for thousands of years taught to be beyond good & evil – *puñña* which is ‘good’ or ‘virtue’ and *pāpa* which is ‘evil’ or ‘sin’ – to be above this and be with the Paramatman, the supreme soul or being, or whatever. And then Buddhism appeared and also taught to be beyond good & evil, to be beyond *puñña* and *pāpa*, but in voidness, in universal voidness or eternal voidness where nothing can do anything to us. This knowledge has been around for thousands of years in all corners of the world, but humanity has forgotten it, humanity ignores it. Nobody is interested in being beyond positive & negative, the good & the bad, *puñña & pāpa*, being free. Nobody is interested in voidness.

Those of you who are Jewish or Christian we request that you go back and read the first pages of the Bible. Especially the second chapter of Genesis, where God forbid Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warned them that if they ate this fruit they would die. Please read this carefully and ponder upon its very profound meaning.

When we’re living in our mothers’ womb we have no problems of positive & negative. When we’re newly born there still isn’t any difficulty over positive & negative. But once our nervous system and sense organs begin to function fully then we begin to have feelings of positive & negative; and then all the problems of food, flesh, and fame begin for us. This is the starting point... the arising of positive & negative is the starting point for all the problems of food, flesh, and fame.

The danger and harm is equal in the positive & negative. These both can harm us. If we’re too much caught in the positive or too much caught in the negative it will keep us from sleeping soundly at night; it can even prevent us from sleeping at all. When the positive & the negative disturb our minds too much it’s harmful to the degree that we can’t even sleep well. The positive is just as dangerous as the negative.

Gladness is tiring in a glad way, in a happy way. Sadness is tiring in a sad sorrowful way. Both of these are debilitating and exhausting. Both of them are dangerous in their own ways. Both of them cause us all kinds of problems in

ordinary life. They are not normal. They are not the state of calm and peace that is normal for the human mind.

When we study *paṭiccasamuppāda* until understanding it correctly and then practice *ānāpānasati* until realizing these things directly deep in our own experience, then we will have *atammayatā*. We practice until seeing that all these things are void, they are void of ‘self.’ There is no selfhood in any of these things that we take to be positive & negative. This voidness of self is called *suññatā* – *suññata* (the voidness). Seeing this we see that things are void of positive & negative. They’re just what they are; they’re just thus. We see this balance or stability in things which we call *tathatā* – *tathatā*, the thusness of things, the balance of things, that they’re neither positive nor negative. And when this stable balance develops to its fullness this is called *atammayatā* – *atammayatā*, where nothing can touch the mind, nothing has power over the mind.

The highest result of insight, the highest insight knowledge or understanding is that of *atammayatā*. The highest state or quality of mind is *atammayatā*. This is to be the *atammayo* (the one who is *atammayatā*, the unconcocted one), which is the same as the *arahant* (the fully awakened being), which is the highest goal of Buddhism.

When there’s no *atammayatā*, positive feelings arise which give rise to positive kinds of defilements, such as greed, lust, jealousy, possessiveness, and greedy stinginess, and so on. And there arise negative feelings which give rise to the negative defilements of aversion, anger, hatred, and so on. If there is uncertainty as to whether it’s positive or negative, if we’re not sure whether something is positive or negative, this gives rise to the defilements of delusion, of doubt, of worry. These various kinds of positive feelings give rise to the greedy kinds of defilements. Negative feelings give rise to the hatred kinds of defilements. And uncertainty as whether something is positive or negative gives rise to the delusion kinds of defilements.

When there is *atammayatā* there is Nibbāna. Nibbāna means ‘coolness.’ Don’t confuse it with death. A lot of people have misunderstood Nibbāna and explained it as being death or something that comes with death, or only happens after death; this is a very confused understanding. The meaning of Nibbāna has nothing to do with death, so please don’t go understanding things the way these confused people have. Nibbāna just means coolness, genuine real coolness. The coolness that isn’t the opposite of heat. Many of us think that coolness is the

opposite of heat. But Nibbāna is the coolness that has no opposite. Ordinary coolness or coldness still has temperature, it still has some degree of heat, it is just a very low level. In the ordinary way of thinking there's coolness with low temperature and heat with high temperature. But the coolness of Nibbāna has no temperature, it's complete freedom from all heat. This is the perfect coolness that is the result of having atammayatā.

This is a coolness (*kwham yen*) that is spiritual (*tung winyan*). It's not a physical coolness (*yen tung jai*), it's spiritual in the mind. Don't confuse this spiritual coolness with ordinary physical or material coolness. Nibbāna means this spiritual coolness (*kwham yen tung winyan*).

Now let's talk about this Nibbāna (coolness) until it is understood.

There are two basic kinds of Nibbāna. The first is called *saupādisesa nibbāna* which means Nibbāna where there is still some remainder. This 'some remainder' means there still remains feelings of positive & negative. But this is Nibbāna, so this positive & negative isn't able to concoct greed, hatred, and delusion. There is still some feelings of positive & negative but they aren't attached to and so they can't bring up the fires of defilement. This is called *saupādisesa nibbāna*, Nibbāna with some remainder.

The second kind of Nibbāna is called *anupādisesa nibbāna*. In this there is no feelings of positive or negative left at all. One doesn't feel positive or negative about anything in any way. This is the Nibbāna with no remainder, the Nibbāna with nothing left.

To make it very simple and brief, we can say that the first kind of Nibbāna still has positive & negative but these can't do anything to the mind. And in the second kind there is no positive or negative left at all.

In the first kind there is still some natural remainder of positive & negative. It's kind of instinctual feeling of positive & negative. But this isn't fuel for defilements of greed, anger, and delusion. In the second kind there is none of this fuel at all. There is not even one drop of the fuel of positive & negative.

In your ordinary lives you can live with feelings of positive & negative, but prevent them from blazing up into fires. You can prevent this fuel from igniting into the defilements. Or even better than that you can live without any feelings of positive & negative. You can be totally free of these, totally cool as you live your ordinary daily existence.

When we can control these feelings of positive & negative so that they don't turn into fires then our life is cool in our everyday life. When we can control positive & negative, there is no way that food can be of any danger to us; there is no way that flesh can endanger us; there is no way that fame can harm us or hurt us in any way, when there is this coolness, when we can control positive & negative.

So for example with food, if it feels delicious to you or it feels not delicious, it's okay. But you can control this so it doesn't ignite fires of greed or lust, or on the negative side aversion, or revulsion, or anger regarding food. If we can control this positive or negative even if the food tastes delicious or not very good, this won't have any power over the mind, the mind can stay free of the food.

As far as sensuality and sex, whether we get it in a form that pleases us or displeases us, or whether we get it at all, or don't have any, this won't lead to any defilement. If we get sex or we don't get any it won't lead to feelings of positive or negative. Or if we satiate the sexual instinct, then whether we get heaven from it or we get a disease from, it this won't stir up the mind.

And then with fame. We are not interested in fame at all. Whether fame comes or fame goes away, or there has never been any fame at all, we are not interested. All we're interested in is being correct, in correctness, in truthfulness, trueness. And then when there is perfect trueness, perfect correctness then we naturally get the highest kind of fame, which is a spiritual kind of fame. It has nothing to do with worldly fame. When there is spiritual fame there may be no fame at all in the world because many in the world don't respect this. But there is a fame which is spiritual or beyond the world.

We could put it this way. One won't have anything to do with the dirty fame and honor as things work in the world. One will have the pure fame and honor of God.

We won't have any problems with food, flesh, and fame when there is thorough understanding of atammayatā, the understanding that is totally above positive & negative.

We must develop our understanding beyond the ordinary level until it becomes the most correct or appropriate activity or action. We must develop our understanding until it becomes right action. Duk here, all he has got is instinctual understanding, instinctual knowledge, a natural kind of *ñāṇa*

(knowledge). But we as human beings have the potential to develop our instinctual knowledge higher and higher until we have a thorough and profound understanding of atammayatā.

Duk here, isn't able to study dependent origination and he can't practice *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness with breathing, so he is unable to develop beyond his instinctual understanding.

If we have correct understanding we see that there is just this flow of conditions dependently originating in this ceaseless flow. We see that there is nothing positive or negative. We realize that these are just concoctions of the human mind. When something pleases them people say, 'it's good.' When something displeases them people say, 'it's bad.' Good & bad have no reality, these are just concoctions of the mind according to what pleases us and displeases us. If we like it, we say it's good. If we dislike it, we say it's bad. But people have different likes & dislikes and so they can never agree on what is good and what is bad, and they are arguing about it all the time. Good & bad are just conventions concocted out of human thought. They're concocted out of the feelings of positive & negative. When we possess this thorough experience of dependent origination, we realize that the illusion of all this good & bad, positive & negative, and see just the flow of conditions.

Even if you call it 'good' or 'positive,' even if you use these words, don't go and attach to it and put yourself at the mercy of these concoctions of the mind. Even if you must say something is 'bad' or 'negative' you don't have to believe in it and attach to it. If we do, these things bite us. If we attach to these words about positive & negative, good & bad, then they bite us. The positive ones bite us in a positive way, the negative ones bite us in a negative way, but they bite us, and claw us, and gnaw on us equally. So the thing is not to attach to these things. To be free of their power. To not be at their mercy. To be above all thoughts, feelings, and words about positive & negative.

When we don't understand paṭiccasamuppāda we look and we see a chicken and a dog; but when we realize the truth of dependent origination all we see is a flow, a stream of conditions; we no longer see a chicken or a dog. We don't see a person or an individual person, we just see this flow of conditions. We don't see female & male. We don't have any more problems about male & female, any more arguments and struggles over male & female because we see the flow of conditions dependently arising out of each other.

Even more refined than that. There is neither this nor that. There is neither here or there. When we see this constant flow of conditions there is no longer one's self or others, there is neither the whole nor the parts, there is neither short nor long, white or black. When there is this thorough and constant realization of dependent origination, there is no longer this or that.

In short there is no positive and there's no negative, these don't arise when there is realization of dependent origination. So one is totally free of the problems of food, flesh, and fame.

Now let us consider the benefit of *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness with breathing.

Regarding the *kāya* (body) – whenever we wish to have cool body, we can adjust, regulate, improve the breathing until it cools the body, so the body is thoroughly cool. This doesn't mean dead; it means no defilements disturbing the body. Whenever we want a cool body we can do so with *ānāpānasati* once we have mastered that part of the practice.

However, no matter what state the world is in, no matter how much chaos, confusion, and stress, to heck with all that. We'll all have a body that is cool and calm in the way we need it to be through the power of *ānāpānasati*.

As for mastering the *vedanā* (the feelings), we can cool all feelings of positive & negative so that there is no coming up of greed, lust, fear, anger, worry, envy, jealousy, excitement, boredom, and so on. We can cool the feelings so that no matter what's going in the world, no matter what great excitement or great tragedy, we can cool our feelings so that we can stay cool amidst a very hot world.

In the third stage of *ānāpānasati*, one can totally master the mind so that there's no feelings of positive or negative at all. When we can master the mind like this we have total mastery over the world, because then there is nothing in the world that has the power to make us positive or negative. We have total freedom over the world.

In the fourth stage of practice, we master our own ignorance. The last thing that can disturb us is mastered through this last part of the practice. So that there is no ignorance at all. We see thoroughly that there is nothing positive or negative anywhere. There is no hint or inkling or anything of positive or negative left when we can master our own ignorance. Then we are totally cool. We are perfectly thoroughly cool.

We can master craving (*taṇhā*). We can master attachment (*upādāna*). We can master all the defilements, the rebirth of new defilements.

And we don't get lost. We don't go astray in superstitions. All these attractive special magical things that can attract us, that seem so positive & negative to us, we aren't lead astray by these in any way.

Please understand the words 'above the world' or 'above and beyond the world.' We need to understand what it is to be above and beyond the world. When we're in the world, the world pulls us and pushes us all over the place. But to be above or beyond the world is to be above and beyond all problems of the world. This body is in the world. This body is always in the world but the mind can be above and beyond the world. This kind of mind that is freed from the world by the *lokuttara dhamma* cannot be troubled or suffer from the world in any way.

This isn't some kind of in between state. Many people think that well this is sadness and this is happiness and we're talking about some kind of indifferent in-between place in the middle. We are not talking about that. It is not *between* the negative & the positive, it's *above* the negative & the positive – *beyond*, totally *beyond* the negative & the positive.

We'd like to point out, or add, one special thing. It's possible that science will continue developing, and will develop further and further to the stage that it can actually produce a pill that will do away with all greed, anger, and delusion. It's possible that science will be able to develop a pill that will control all of this positive & negative. And then you can take one of them each day and you won't have any problems with positive & negative, food, flesh, and fame, and so on. But then your body will start to develop resistance to this and you will have to take more pills and more pills and more pills. You'll become more and more dependent on or addicted to this material remedy. So even if science can develop to this degree it can never compete with the Dhamma. It can never take the place of the Dhamma, to which there is no possibility of developing resistance. Since the Dhamma is inside, it's not some need to depend on something outside. This *lokuttara dhamma* that we have been talking about will lead to a freedom that is complete, total, eternal instead of just a merely temporary dependency kind of freedom.

This long discourse is to help us to understand that if we have the *lokuttara dhamma*, the Dhamma above and beyond the world, then we can fight with and

overcome the defilements whether we are on the level of beggars or the highest angels or gods in heaven. That with the lokuttara dhamma we can overcome all levels of food, flesh, and fame, whether the lowest level or the very highest.

So finally thanks for being good listeners, it's been over an hour and a half. We wish you the best success in finding the *lokuttara dhamma* so that you will have no problems in your ordinary life. So that you can be totally free of all positive & negative in your lives. Thank you.

So may we end today's meeting.

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