

## Timelessness and meditation

by Piya Tan

One of the most mysterious aspects of the Dharma is that it is “timeless” (akalika). This interesting quality can be experienced “here and now” (sa.n.di.t.thika), and we are to “come and see” (ehi passika) it for ourselves.

When we are troubled by things we do not like, we wish time would move faster. When we are enjoying something, we feel as if it is too short a time. But when we are really enjoying something, especially when we are joyful, it feels like forever. This is because we have touched the present moment.

Present-moment awareness can be cultivated. All we need to do is close our eyes and focus on something going on in the body, say, the breath. The first thing we might notice is that some thoughts are dancing in our minds.

Some of these thoughts are from the past: What did I do today? I should have done that ages ago. Why did I not do this thing? And so on. Other thoughts are about the future: What will I do after this? I will do this and this later. This person has not returned my call. And so on. We are not in the present moment at all.

We need to return to the present moment where we really are: we need to return to the breath. We can begin by simply noting the “in” and “out” of the breath with these two words. As we become more focussed on the breath, simply know it is coming in, simply know it is going out.

If we hear a sound, know it, let it go. Do not comment on it, do not add anything. Let it come, let it go. If a thought arises, know it, let it come, let it go in the same manner.

Pain and discomfort can be a wonderful teacher. Pain is a natural thing because we have a body. Physical pain can be removed by a small adjustment in the way we sit. So if we assume a good posture right from the start, we need not move at all right through the meditation.

How does bodily pain become mental pain? When we “own” it: we complain “I” am feeling this pain; it is hurting “me,” “my” body is suffering. We are thinking, not meditating.

How do we learn from pain? First acknowledge it: this is pain (numbness, discomfort, a tic). Observe it for what it is: it rises, peaks, and falls away. It may go on for a while, but it will sooner or later stop. Pain is impermanent.

If we can do this, then we are experiencing inner peace for ourselves. No one can do this for us. Wisdom arises through the persistence in watching impermanence in all our actions. As such, true reality arises to the wise (paccatta.m veditabbo vi~n~nuhi), without any help from others.

This wisdom gives us access (opanayika) to inner peace that frees us from the ideas of evil, sin, fear, anger, and other negative emotions. The most wonderful thing about such a spiritual exercise is that we are in charge. No dogma, no belief, no worship, no religion: just the present moment of stillness.

Meditation shows us how thoughts (both ours and others) control us, and how to let go of them. We begin to truly feel, and then we let go of that feeling, too. We begin to know directly a sense of profound peace. There is nothing more to know, but this blissful peace that is energizing, empowering and liberating.

Thus the Buddha Dharma is well taught (svaakkhaata). It is up to us to seek within ourselves that true peace and joy. (You might like to read this from the start again so that you know what to do, if not already.)

You have also reflected on the six qualities of the Buddha Dharma.

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