

## Getting to know the mind

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There are a lot of good things happening in the world today, but unfortunately there are also a lot of unpleasant things going on at the same time. The most obvious and striking failure of humanity is the inability to live in peace and harmony with one another. We have so many conflicts, so many separations of human beings according to race, colour, beliefs, politics and religion. There seems to be a never ending source of conflict and strife in human beings even though it is so obvious that all human beings are striving for happiness. Whatever we do in life, whatever we undertake, wherever we go it is always in the quest for happiness. If we really contemplate the motivation behind all our actions, be it study, work, relationships, involvement in political or religious movements, the basic motivation behind that action is the quest for peace and true happiness.

Buddhism is primarily concerned with peace. We say that the Buddha was one who was at peace, and that he taught the path to peace. So I feel that Buddhism must have something very, very relevant to share with human beings especially about the path to peace and true happiness.

In Buddhism we say that we strive to protect ourselves and to protect others. By protecting myself, I protect others, by protecting others, I protect myself. So the aim of a Buddhist is to create outer harmony and inner peace. We say that "The mind is the forerunner to all things". The quality of the mind is that which determines the quality of life, so that if we see continuous strife, confusion and conflict in the world, wars, discriminations and exploitations then that can only reflect the quality of the minds of human beings. So the individual minds of human beings must also be in a state of confusion, conflict, oppression and aggression, because all actions, whether good or bad, have "mind as the forerunner". In Buddhism we place great emphasis on the mind. We train the mind so that we begin to understand the mind, and ultimately to liberate it.

Most people are very much caught up in living in concepts, beliefs and ideas. We live in the world of ideas, thinking about life, existence, ourselves and liberation, but that is not the real experience of the way things are. Thinking about means "going around", not going to the centre or point. The Buddha was very much concerned with the practice rather than theory and I think what Buddhism has to offer humanity today is a way of getting to know the mind, training the mind and liberating the mind. If Buddhism just remains in the realm of intellect, that is study, the accumulation of knowledge, ideas and concepts, logical as they may be intellectually, gratifying and satisfying and stimulating as they may be, that will still not resolve the essence of the problem that humanity faces today.

The essence of the problem is conflict. In the realm of conditioned phenomena (and conditioned phenomena here refers to all physical, material or mental phenomena) everything that is created is called in *Pali* "*Sankhara*", that which arises and passes away. As long as we abide in the realm of conditioned phenomena then there will always be a multiplicity. There will always be a never ending variety, a never ending multiplicity, and where there is multiplicity there can never be complete peace because there is always conflict, there is always disagreement.

Peace in the world is directly related to the peace of individual human beings, they are not separate, but very much related to each other. To create inner peace within individual human beings is to contribute to the outer peace of this world, because if we have peaceful human beings, we will have a peaceful world. If we have human beings who are confused and in conflict, the world will remain in confusion and conflict. If Buddhism

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is going to have this ability to contribute to world peace by contributing to the individual human being's realisation of peace, we must really apply the teachings of the Buddha, we must really get to its heart.

So I very much stress the importance of practising the teachings of the Buddha, getting to know the mind, training the mind. In order to liberate the mind it requires an approach which aims at this particular end, the true peace of the mind. How can we realise true peace of the mind? It's certainly not by believing. Belief is always in the realm of concept and duality and where there is duality there must be conflict. So I think that when we teach Buddhism and Buddhist meditation we should very much be stressing the essence of the Buddha's teaching, which is the way to peace. We should remember that what the Buddha taught was a path or a road. He did not teach the "*Lokuttara Dhamma*" or the ultimate truth as this truth cannot be taught. All He could teach was the "*Sammuti Dhamma*", which means the conceptual or conventional *Dhamma* which he compared to a raft. This raft is to get us from this shore to the other — but please remember that the raft is not the other shore.

His Teachings are also likened to a road to be journeyed upon, but the road is not the destination. With rafts and roads there will always be a variety and if we attach to them as being something absolute, there will always be conflict.

The Buddha was pointing towards letting go, liberation of the mind, not towards tying up the mind with more concepts, ideas and beliefs. The Buddha was very much pointing to the way of liberating the mind from all concepts, all views, opinions and all belief. He was pointing to the essence of mind, and the essence of mind is not a concept. The essence of mind is not a view, an opinion, a belief or a thought. The essence of mind is bright and empty, it is the knowing mind, the Buddha-mind — the "one who knows".

This seems all very abstract in the beginning because when we talk about getting to know the mind, training the mind, liberating the mind, unless one has taken time to stop and question and enquire one doesn't really know what this means. This is why meditation is very important, but not meditation as a particular technique, the technique is only concerned with getting to know the mind and training the mind. The Buddha himself taught many different meditation techniques and we can find many, many more techniques than one finds in the Buddhist scriptures. The technique is just a tool to be used, not some thing absolute in itself.

This practise of meditation, of getting to know the mind, of training and liberating the mind is very, very important. It's a way to start breaking through the concepts, of not just thinking about life, but beginning to actually experience life, experience reality.

As we train the mind in this concentration then we begin to understand what the mind does, what the mind is, what the mind is doing all the time and we begin to appreciate what the monkey mind really is. The monkey mind is always jumping from one thing to another, it's the mind that is always conceiving and thinking, living in concepts and continually reacting with desire and aversion to the experiences that we encounter.

So we begin to notice the mind, what it does, how it reacts, the contents of the mind. This is the first step in training the mind. Then we begin to discipline the mind, instead of just letting it run about jumping from one thing to another in a continuous stream of blind activity we begin to say .... Stop! Let's just see if we can abide in the here and now and stop thinking about the here and now. Try to stop and be present here and now using a meditation technique.

Now as the mind becomes more peaceful, clear and tranquil through repeated training, then we can begin to reflect. What does it mean to reflect? It means to look closely. If we want to understand the nature of the world and existence where can we possibly look other than in this very mind. The Buddha said that the *Dhamma* is to be seen in this fathom long body with it's perceptions and feelings. Within this body and mind *Dhamma* is to be seen, so that when we train the mind and the mind is reasonably clear we can look and see

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everything within the mind. The mind is that which knows, the body can only offer the sense faculties of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching and the brain the facility for thinking and creating. What is it that knows? It is the mind that knows. Where is the world? It is in the mind. It is the mind which knows the world through the senses, there is no other way that we can know the world. So, if we want to understand the world, if we want to understand the nature of existence we must come and look at the nature of the mind. We must come and observe and enquire into the mind, we must dwell within and observe with a clear mind.

Now this is of great benefit and of great value to humanity and to individual peace, because it is the way to resolve all duality and all conflicts because when we begin to look deeply and observe the mind we can begin to stop living in the world of concepts and stop living in the world of just believing. As Buddhists we are not interested in just believing something. The Buddha was pointing to something which was beyond concepts, beyond views and opinions, beyond just belief. He was pointing to something that can be experienced, the essence of the mind which can know the nature of all conditioned phenomena.

The source of strife is that people believe conditioned phenomena, they take refuge in views and opinions through attachment. To take refuge means to "hold on to", and what do we hold onto? The fact that there is so much conflict in the world can only indicate that people hold onto conditioned phenomena, hold on to the body as being self, my body. If I hold on to the opinion that I am a European, a male then I am at odds with the Asian, and the female. I have made a difference, a distinction and a separation. Or if I hold on to my views that we should have nuclear disarmament, then I am at odds again with the people who believe that there should not be nuclear disarmament. If I believe there is no God, so I am at odds with the person who says "I believe there is a God". Now we see that the source of conflict and limitation here is this believing in or taking refuge in concepts, conditioned phenomena, *sankhara*.

As a Buddhist, one who takes refuge in the Buddha, "the one who knows", this is not a concept, an idea or a belief. It is a knowing in the present moment. As a Buddhist we take refuge in the *Dhamma*, not the *Dhamma* as the spoken or written word or the concepts and cultural peculiarities of one sect or another, but the *Dhamma* as the realisation of "the way things are". The *Dhamma* is the truth of the way things are, so that now, through meditation, we incline towards this knowing through the mind, that which is peaceful and clear through the mind. We begin to reflect and have a new perspective on ourselves and the experience of life.

So this is a practice which is of great relevance to us as individual human beings striving for true peace and happiness, but also of relevance to the world as a whole because it is the way to resolve all the conflicts, it is the way for humanity to get beyond the duality and begin to resolve the source of all conflict. Without this ability to turn to the depths and essence of the mind to gain a true perspective on this life, humanity will always be caught in the conceptual, there will always be multiplicity and duality. For Buddhist people who want to follow in the path of the Buddha this is something we can really offer to humanity today and we can offer it not just by talking about it, but essentially by living it.

We as Buddhists have a wonderful message which is of great relevance, so if we as individual Buddhists can be an example of this, by living in this way, by practising in this way, then I think we will be truly a benefit to this world and to Buddhism.

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