

Right attitude of acceptance

Ajahn Jagaro

The most important thing in our lives is the cultivation of the mind. If we are honest we will see that most of the time we are concerned only with our bodies. The greater portion of our lives is spent cultivating protecting, clothing, sheltering, comforting, warming and feeding our bodies.

But a healthy body does not always mean a healthy mind. When we begin to look, listen and become aware of ourselves we recognise that the mind is far from healthy. What does this mean? It means that we are not at all happy, joyful or peaceful in the mind. It is filled with all sorts of nagging complaints, irritations, negativity, pettiness, jealousies, envy, desires, expectations, fears and worries. These are what we call the nagging problems or ailments of the mind.

These days, especially in the West, more and more people are becoming aware of these ailments of the mind and are seeking for a way to cure or at least to reduce these ailments so that the mind can be truly peaceful, happy and joyful. This is why people are now turning towards the practice of meditation and to different paths of spiritual training and cultivation. Whichever path we choose, the aim of all people is basically the same. We all seek happiness. We all strive to have a peaceful and happy mind.

Christmas is traditionally a time of love and peace, peace for all the world and love for humanity. It is a time when we are supposed to be loving everyone with a peaceful and loving heart. But then we may notice that our lives are not quite up to this ideal, and so there is this seeking, this interest in mind cultivation. And which path should we tread? This we must find out for ourselves as the great Teachers only point the way.

So one comes to this Buddhist Centre and hears a description of the path in Buddhist terminology; we practice Buddhist meditation using a specific technique and method of training. But remember that one's aim and interest *is* to realise peace and happiness and each one of you must reflect on your own experience. We are all different yet we are all the same.

When the Lord Buddha described a human being he did not say that some are made up like this and others are made up like that. He said that all bodies are composed of the four elements – water, earth, heat and air – and that all humans also have feelings, they have the ability to perceive and remember, to conceive and construct, and all have consciousness. All human beings who are as yet unenlightened have the same problems, they are not really happy or really peaceful. So as human beings there is this great affinity which we have for each other, this sense that we all aspire for peace and happiness and we are all in the same boat together.

How can we find this peace? A very important thing in our lives is our attitude. Right attitude, I would say, is the most important thing. If you have the wrong attitude there is suffering and difficulty, but if you have the right attitude there is peace. We have all sat in meditation tonight concentrating on our breath and what have we experienced? Peacefulness or tension? It just depends on your attitude, doesn't it?

What does it mean to be peaceful? Sometimes we have such ideals about what it means. If we think that our mind must always be still and completely steady that is very difficult to sustain in our ordinary lives with so many contacts and conflicts.

So we have to have a different idea of peace, we must change our attitude. What is the right attitude we should develop which will bring about peace and relaxation of the mind? It is *the attitude of accepting things as they*

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are right now. By allowing things to be as they are right now brings about this relaxation and peace of mind. If you don't accept and are working from the idea of expectation, having to have, this has to be, this has to happen or this is the way it should be, you are refusing the present. When you refuse the present, there is always tension and you are even further away from peace.

So the first thing is just accepting and learning acceptance. When thoughts come, you know them, let them go. You accept that that is quite natural, that's just the way of the mind. That is the way it is, right now. This accepting attitude immediately gives you a sense of peace and relaxation. Now this is very, very important because if you approach meditation with a sense of gain and achievement, expectation or force then it's no longer an exercise in peace.

We are meditating to be peaceful, so be peaceful from the very start, by having a peaceful approach. We practice the spiritual path to be peaceful so the important thing is to be peaceful in this one moment. Now the stress here on peacefulness is not necessarily stillness. It does not mean emptiness, stillness of mind with no thoughts. To be peaceful does not mean that we have to go through the whole day without getting uptight in the slightest way, without any friction, restlessness or conflict. It does not mean that we go through the whole day smiling like the Buddha statue. You are not that, you are a human being. with feelings and senses, living in a sensitive body. So if you have this ideal that to be peaceful means to go around like the Buddha statue you are just going to be more and more disappointed, which means less and less peaceful. So again, this accepting attitude, accepting situation, yourself and what you are experiencing in life brings relaxation. There is relaxation if you can just accept.

This attitude of acceptance is also the means to develop love. We all have this very high ideal of what love should be, that we should love others and all humanity. To love you simply means I can accept you and give you space to be without developing aversion or being overly critical, without wanting to do something to change you. This is the first step in loving, accepting, allowing others to be, to give them space and not dwelling in aversion. Dwelling in aversion means that you're picking the faults, picking what you don't like or agree with and dwelling on it.

You become obsessed with the faults so that rather than loving you are trying to destroy the other person in your mind. So acceptance here is a foundation for love to arise. Just as we accept the present situation now within what we are experiencing in the mind, so we accept people as they are with their limitations and differences, giving them room to exist.

When we begin to develop this attitude, peace arises in the mind, peace with ourselves and others and out of that peacefulness arises all that is noble, worthy and skilful. From peace comes mindfulness.

The Lord Buddha said that just as the footprint of an elephant can encompass the footprint of every other living animal, in the same way, from the basis of peacefulness and mindfulness all other skilful *Dhammas* can grow, be cultivated and developed.

I remember when I first started meditating this accepting attitude was the one thing that was so hard. While training under Ven Ajahn Chah, there were two things which he seemed to me to stress greatly. Firstly was morality and secondly, attitude. Morality or discipline was just the way of doing things, a way of living that was orderly, so that we could live together and then around that discipline was the cultivation of right attitude. Whether one is living in a monastery or within a family, until one has this right attitude it will always be difficult and a struggle. But as soon as one develops this right attitude there is peace and a sense of relief. Don't have such high ideals of peace and love that they are impossible to attain in this human form with all our limitations.

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With a new attitude begin to see that peace does not mean always being blissed out, loving everybody and everything. This attitude of acceptance means accepting things just as they are now, relaxing into and giving space to people and situations.

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