

Short Transcript

**Understanding Awareness In Every
Breath We Take,
Every Thought We Create
And
Every Move
We Make In Cultivation**

A **Short Transcript** from the Q&A section of the **recording**
done during the Dhamma talk

Delivered by: Brother Teoh Kian Koon
On the 27TH **November 2015**
At **TI-RATANA BUDDHIST SOCIETY NBC**
KLANG, SELANGOR

For free distribution (to **non-Muslims** only)

Donated by:

Kalyāṇamitta funds of Brother Teoh Kian Koon
Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Dated: 28TH February 2016

Dhamma talk by: Bro. Teoh Kian Koon

Dhamma topic: Understanding Awareness in Every Breath We take, every thought we create and every move we make in cultivation

Venue: Tiratana Buddhist Society NBC centre, Klang, Selangor.

Date: 27th November 2015

Session 2 – Question and Answer (1:38:58)

Question by Sis Jeanne's son:

Just now when Bro Teoh talked about the meditation techniques the impression I got was those were just **methodologies** to **achieve** some kind of principles. But basing on my understanding from my **limited knowledge** during my time in Buddhism, I understood that Buddha also taught **one technique** which was **ānāpānasati**. How do you reconcile this difference?

Brother Teoh:

This is a very good question. Let us start our inquiry from zero base or a clean slate via assuming that we don't know anything. We don't try to be right or wrong. We start by **inquiring**: what are methods? What are techniques? Can you try to answer these inquiries? Methods and techniques are just **series of instructions** to try **to do things, isn't it?** In that sense, every method, every technique is bound to be different. So what is it for? It has

nothing to do with meditation, isn't it? A series of instructions to do something is **definitely not meditation**. So what is the meditation as taught by the Buddha? Yes! – Meditation is **to train** the **mind** in **heedfulness** to cultivate **Noble Eight Fold Path (N8FP)**.

That's why the essence of the Buddha's teaching is the **Four Noble Truth**. And **within** this Four Noble Truths which Truth is the meditation? The **1st Noble Truth** explained the **prevalence of suffering** – the **realities of life** and **existence** and the **2nd Noble Truth** explained the **cause of suffering**. Then the **3rd Noble Truth** states that **suffering need not be** and **Enlightenment in the here and the now, Nibbāna** can be **realised**. All these are **not meditation** because all these are **proclamations of Truths, Noble Truths** that **can make you a Noble One**. But the **4th Noble Truth** is different. The Buddha said, 'there is a path namely the **Noble 8-Fold Path (N8FP)**, if you cultivate this N8FP it will lead to the **end of all suffering**.' This is the **meditation** which can lead to the **end of all suffering** which is the **enlightenment**.

So **whatever meditation** you do **if it does not** bring you **back** to the **N8FP** then it is not the meditation as taught by the Buddha. So can we have an understanding of this first?

Then to **reconcile** with the part on **ānāpānasati as taught** by the **Buddha** we need to inquire further: 'Is this ānāpānasati as taught by the Buddha also a method or a technique for us to train our mind?' What did the Buddha mention under the opening statement of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness?

He said: *"Ekāyano ayaṃ bhikkhave maggo..."*

"Oh! Bhikkhu this is the **only way** for the **purification of beings**, for the **overcoming of sorrow and lamentation**, for **reaching the right path** and for **realising the enlightenment** namely the **cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.**"

Ah, this is the **real meditation** and the **cultivation** of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness includes the **cultivation** of the Four Noble Truths as described under the **last category** of practice within **Dhammānupassanā**, the **last** or 4th foundation of mindfulness. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness starts with Kāyānupassanā as the 1st foundation. Are you all familiar with the 4 Foundations of Mindfulness (4FOM)?

The 4FOM is for you to **cultivate** the **mindfulness** on the **4 foundations** leading to the **awakening**. There are **four foundations** for you **to anchor** your mind. The 1st

Foundation is **Kāyānupassanā**, which means mindfulness of the Kāya, the physical body. Your **breath** is part of the physical body, your **rising and falling** of your abdomen is also part of the physical body. Your **four postures** of **sitting, standing, walking** and **lying down** are also part of your physical body. The thirty two parts, the four elements - they are all part of the physical body. That is the reason why they are all place under kāyānupassanā. It also includes the 9 stages of bodily or cemetery decomposition of a person who had died. And the first category of cultivation within Kāyānupassanā as taught by the Buddha is **to start off with ānāpānasati**. That is **to train** your mind to be **mindful** of the **in and out breath**. He never said **focus** and **concentrate**. He said **to train** the **mind** to be **aware** or **mindful** leading **to heedfulness**. That is also the reason why **Dhammapada Verse 21** said,

"Heedfulness is the path to the deathless whereas heedlessness is the path to the dead. The Heedful never dies and the heedless are as if dead."

That verse states very clearly that you **need to have heedfulness**. The moment you **are heedful** you are **destined** for **enlightenment**. The moment you are **heedless** you are **as if dead**. **Spiritually you are dead** and this is very clear.

Hence **ānāpānasati** is just to train the mind to be **mindful; to be aware leading to heedfulness only**. Then what is **heedfulness**? The Buddha under Dhammapada **Verse 23** confirms what heedfulness is. He said the **constantly meditative, ever mindful and steadfast one**, they will **realise the supreme** born free **enlightenment** which is **nibbāna** in the here and the now. So what is **constantly meditative** and what is **ever mindful**?

When you **combine these two** they **become heedfulness**. That's why in order to be **heedful** to realise the enlightenment which is the **deathless** you have to be **ever mindful**. To be ever mindful you **have to train** your mind to be **mindful**. That is why the Buddha recommends that we **start** with **ānāpānasati**. That is the reason why **all methods and techniques** are just **an initial skilful means to train the mind** to be **mindful** so that this mind **does not wander off** and **become heedless or lost in thought**.

Then **after** you have **developed** the **ānāpānasati** the Buddha said **don't** continue to do it anymore. Instead **one must move on** to the second category of cultivation which is to develop the **daily mindfulness** of the **four postures: standing** aware, **walking** aware, **sitting** aware and **lying down** also **aware**. You must develop this **awareness until** it is **very stable**. Then after you have done this you have to

connect up all the **in between movements** of these four postures. That's why He said you move onto the **third** category of cultivation which is the **daily mindfulness** in **daily life** of **all action** and **all movements** in **between the 4 postures**. And **this cultivation** is called **sati sampajañña** (mindfulness and clear comprehension). Then you will **insight** into phenomena as described by me earlier to realise the **3 universal characteristics** of **impermanence**, **suffering state** and **non-self**. You will then have the **stability of mindfulness** to see your **mental intentions** very clearly; you will have the **clarity** of mind to understand the **spiritual teachings**, the **essential dhamma**, etc. Then only you can develop the **contemplation** of the **thirty two parts** of your body and the **four elements** followed by the **9 stages** of **cemetery decomposition** contemplation.

Only then you can move onto the cultivation of the 2nd **foundation** of mindfulness which is **vedanānupassanā**, or **mindfulness of feelings**.

Then after that you move onto the cultivation of the 3rd **foundation** of mindfulness which is the **mindfulness of the mind or cittānupassanā**. That is mindfulness of the **content of consciousness** then only you can move on to the last or 4th foundation of mindfulness which is

dhammānupassanā or **mindfulness of the essential dhamma** as taught by the **Buddha** - starting with **mindfulness of the five mental hindrances**, followed by the **mindfulness of the Five Aggregates of Form and Mind**, followed by mindfulness of the **6 internal sense bases** and the **six external sense bases** or **mindfulness of the 18 sense realms** to develop the **wisdom** and the understanding. Then the **Factors of Enlightenment** will keep on arising for you to develop the **mindfulness of these factors of enlightenment**. When you are **mindful or aware** of these **seven factors of enlightenment**, then you are **aware** that you are on the **right path**. That is the reason why under the **seven stages of purification**, there is this fifth **purification of 'what is path and non-path'**. This purification can be clearly understood when you are able to be mindful of the enlightenment factors. It will become very clear.

Then after that you can move onto the **last category of mindfulness** training which the **mindfulness of the Four Noble Truths**. Ah.... this is the stage of cultivation where **you can become enlightened**. Four Noble Truths are truths that can make you **noble ones** or **enlightened ones**. They are called **ariya sacca** and **Sacca is truth**. **Ariya** are **enlightened ones** or **noble ones**. Enlightened ones are noble ones who are **very noble** in their speech, their

action and their livelihood. And the way they carry themselves. Their action, speech and thought and their livelihood are all very noble. They also have noble understanding of life. That's why they have **right view**. Then they are **very noble** in the **way they live life**, right living. They constantly cultivate the **4 right efforts** to train themselves and **to purify** their thoughts via their right effort **to abandon** those **unwholesome action, thought and speech** that have already arisen and **later prevent** the **arising** of those wrong thoughts, unwholesome thought, action and speech. Then they will have the right effort **to purify** whatever defilements they have. Then from there they will cultivate the understanding of what constitute right thought, right speech, right action and then they will arise the **right effort** to **promote** all those right thought, right speech, right action that are **still not in them**. Then the last right effort is **to refine upon** and **to perfect** all these right thought, speech and action.

That is why to cultivate this you need **sati**; the next Noble Eight Fold Path factor is right mindfulness. That's why you have **to train your mind to be ever mindful** to cultivate the **four foundations of mindfulness** which **includes** the **Four Noble Truths**. When **your mindfulness is stabilised**, it will **become Samādhi**. Then when Sati and Samādhi is there **you can see things as they are** and you can **insight**

into phenomena and awaken. That's **how wisdom comes to be**. That's how your **mind transforms** and **develops equanimity**, which is an enlightenment factor. And this mind that **has equanimity doesn't waver anymore**. It **doesn't** need **Samādhi** to make the mind **collected** and **unwavering**. Then that **Upekkhā** or **equanimity** enlightenment factor **born** of **wisdom** is **enough to stabilise** that mind. It doesn't need Samādhi anymore. It doesn't need the **energy field** or **concentrated mind to remain peaceful**. So this is how you can develop the understanding.

Sis Jeanne's son: Just to ask one last question. Thanks for the lengthy explanation just now. Unfortunately I didn't get pass that one.

Bro Teoh: Never mind it is recorded.

Sis Jeanne's son: So regarding step one, the principle we are trying to aim for is **mindfulness** and **heedfulness**.

Bro Teoh: Yes! Mindfulness **leading** to heedfulness

Sis Jeanne's son: And one of the techniques is ānāpānasati or you can use any kind of method or technique.

Bro Teoh: Any skilful means - May it be a method or a technique. Ānāpānasati only comes in later. That's why if

you read the satipaṭṭhāna sutta's opening introduction, the Buddha always uses these words: "**After overcoming covetousness and grief**" then only you do the satipaṭṭhāna practices. Can you understand that? Brother Teh will understand? It is stated in the Satipaṭṭhāna sutta. After **overcoming** covetousness and grief..... So what is covetousness? It is **craving or desire**. **Grief** means you **can still be unhappy** and you still have **suffering**. That's why **without that** if you go into the Four Foundations of Mindfulness **without** understanding then you are **wasting your time**.

That is **you do not know** what the meditation is. You **do not know** how to cultivate. These are the **initial wisdom** you need to develop first. Which means you must have the **understanding** of the **essential dhamma** based on the **first turning** and the **second turning** of the **4 Noble Truth's cultivation** first. This initial wisdom must arise first. The **five daily contemplations**, you must understand them too. That is why the essential dhamma like the **three universal characteristics** you must understand it at least up till the **contemplative level** then only you can go into the **four foundations of mindfulness** cultivation.

That is why you need **Right View**. From **Right View you start**. That is why it is all sequenced out within the N8FP.

Without Right View you cannot start the Noble Eight Fold Path cultivation because **right view is the first path factor**. Why must you have right view? If you don't have right view you don't understand the **nature's law that governs life and existence** then you **cannot** start. When your view is wrong what happens to your thought process. Ah! Your thought will be wrong, isn't it? Then **since thought conditions mental intention that conditions your action and speech**, so if you have wrong view that condition your wrong thoughts then all your speech, action and livelihood will also be wrong. So what is going to happen to your Noble Eight Fold Path? It will collapse! That is why you need Wisdom, Right View. You need to listen to dhamma **to straighten your view**. The **contemplative wisdom** is very important. And the **first two turnings** can also lead to sainthood too, *sotāpannaship* and *sakadāgāmīship*.

So this is how you develop the training. That is the reason why **dhamma has three phases**. Phase one is ***pariyatti***, - the learning of the teaching or the doctrine. That is why you should spend more time understanding his teaching. Then second stage which is ***paṭipatti*** is to put this teaching into **practice**, into **cultivation**. This is where you develop the actual cultivation. After you have developed this training and awaken then you get **to reap the third phase** of dhamma which is ***paṭivedha***. Ah, you reap the fruition

of your hard work. You get to live the life of a noble one, an enlightened being. These are the 3 phases of dhamma.

That's why you have to start with the cultivation of **pariyatti** which is the learning of the teaching, the doctrine. Then from there you should develop the **contemplative wisdom**. Only then **you know how to start** the 4FOM cultivation. To me if your **5 spiritual faculties** are there already then **technically** you **don't need to train** your **mind**. Method and technique are **not** necessary. They are **only needed** for people who have **not developed** their **5 spiritual faculties**. Like what I said just now, **not everybody who comes** for meditation already have the **spiritual faculties**. Most of them **don't have** and some **don't** even understand what **spiritual faculties** are. What are **mental hindrances**? Why are they **not** peaceful? Most of the time all these understanding are **not taught** to them, so **how can they start** to do the meditation. **That's the reason why** they have to come out **with methods and techniques**, so that their **heedless thinking mind** can be **tamed** via anchoring their mind to the **object of meditation**. They are **so heedless** and **so habitual** in their response to **sense experiences**. They **think a lot** and their **thinking** are so fast and so habitual. That's why when **they try** to be **mindful** of their breathing, **within split second**

they are **lost in thought**. Unless they have already trained their mind otherwise it is not easy.

You can go and try it out yourself, experience it yourself. If you can't even **maintain** your mindfulness for **5 seconds or longer** then **how can you be ever mindful** in the **midst of life**? If **during formal meditation** also you cannot **maintain** that **mindfulness** then in the **midst** of your **daily life**, when your **senses are fully operating**, you will be worst off. 'God' bless you if you think you can do it. That's **why you need to train** this **heedless mind**. It's not easy but **when you understand** then it's **not difficult**. The problem is **when you don't understand** it is like very difficult. But the **moment you understand** it is **so simple**. That's why if you ask me, I will say it is **very easy**, it is **very simple**.

But if you don't understand, you will say, 'Bro Teoh I have tried so hard but I still cannot do it.' Then why certain kalyāṇamitta who are here only for **three or four months**, they **can get it** and their **minds can transform** so fast. These are people who **may not necessary** meditate very seriously. But because they **listen attentively** and they **understand** what is being shared. Then **without doubt** and with their **faith** they just **follow simple instructions** and do **accordingly** then they got it. Just like last night that boy

was fantastic isn't it? He must have his past and he will move very fast. He texted me later on and said, "Bro Teoh **thank you so much** for that sharing and I need you to guide me further." According to him he has this **inner call** for him to go into this **spiritual teaching**. Then I smiled and I replied to him. I said it is your **affinity** with the Triple Gems especially with Sākyamuni Buddha's nature that makes all these possible. When the **time comes**, when the **conditions had arisen, everything will fall into place**. And you will just happen to be there. Then he understands. That was his **first lesson, nobody taught him**. Before that he **doesn't know** any dhamma. He is a **Christian by faith** yet all these are possible.

Rejoicing from the floor: Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

One last question from Bro Teh: I think it was mentioned in Buddhaghosa's book that there is just suffering but there is no one suffering and there's no traveller along the path it's just the Path which is the Noble Eight Fold Path. But in the Heart Sutra it was mentioned by the Buddha that there is no Noble Eight Fold Path, no 4 Noble Truths, no arising of ignorance, no cessation, nor is there Wisdom. Can you explain how these two can reconcile?

Bro Teoh: Very good question and Sādhu! It's very easy to understand. You must not miss this line – 'In **true**

emptiness....' when you read the Heart Sutra. Kuan Yin Bodhisatta said, '***In True Emptiness*** (i.e. when you have realised true Emptiness) there is no Four Noble Truth; No one born, no one die, no one sick and 'hei no you'; 'hei no me'; No one to be enlightened; no one to suffer etc.'

Because the realisation of nibbāna is the **unconditioned** and this cannot be described or expressed in words or concept. The **unconditioned don't have dhamma**, don't have **words**. These are for the **conditioned world**. That's why the dhamma is for the conditioned world. The dhamma points towards the Truth. It's like the **finger pointing at the Moon**. Are you familiar with the **Zen analogy of the finger pointing at the moon**? If you want to realise the moon, you **have to gaze beyond** this finger. The dhamma points towards the realisation of nibbāna, which is the Enlightenment. If you want to realise nibbāna you **must not attach to this dhamma** because this dhamma belongs to the **conditioned world**. That's why you will understand why the Heart Sutra said, - 'Form does not differ from Emptiness and Emptiness does not differ from Form for Form is Emptiness and Emptiness is form. And in true emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception etc. and no Four Noble Truths.'

It depends on your wisdom, how you see it, how you understand it. That's why in the Mahāyana teaching it is

mentioned that there are **3 levels of 'seeing mountain'**. 'Kan shan shi shan' ('看山是山') – seeing mountain as mountain is the first level of seeing or **mundane seeing**. To **mundane people**, when they **see mountain** it means **mountain**, why do you want to argue? Then the wise one when they had penetrated the dhamma they can see **beyond Form** because they can see the **unreality** of Form. Then to them, '看山不是山' – meaning 'seeing mountain as not mountain', because the **word** and the **concept** of 'mountain' hasn't arisen as yet, hence **the reason why they can see things as they are** via just the **pure perception** or the **pure consciousness**. This is the **2nd level of seeing** termed the **direct seeing**, the **pure perception**, no words, nothing. But after that stage when it has become **fully understood** or when the **awakening deepens** and **stabilised**, then you realise that the condition world is the conditioned world. People who are still deluded, not enlightened they will say '看山是山' then at that time you don't argue with people anymore. If they say it's a mountain then it's mountain. Then when the Enlightened One comes along and say '看山不是山' – that there is no mountain, then you will say 'ya' there is no mountain because you can **accord and flow** since you have penetrated the dhamma of the **3rd level** or **transcendental seeing** via seeing things as they are **with wisdom** and **without any duality**. Because these are conditioned dhamma and these are not real dhamma. So there is no conflict. Everything is perfect in the Heart

Sutra. Ok? Brother Teh, you must have missed out the word, 'In true emptiness....' That's why it is also stated in the Heart Sutra that, "**True emptiness is wonderful existence**". If you **penetrate True Emptiness** then life becomes **meaningful and wonderful**.

Bro Teh: The reason is for you to explain to others.

Bro Teoh: (Laughs) Yes! I understand, that means he himself understood the teaching but he just wants **to create the condition** for you all to understand it also as he also knows that the talk is recorded. This type of sharing can help many cultivators in their understanding mainly because this type of understanding is very difficult to come by, it is **very rare**. Ok? Thank you so much for listening.

From the floor: Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Acknowledgement: Special thanks should be accorded to **Sister Nancy** who has personally taken the initiative to do up the draft transcript for my subsequent editing thereby enabling this dhamma booklet to be printed. Sādhu! X3.

