

Programme: WBU Buddhist Sunday Forum
Topic: The Direct Path for the Purification of Beings Satipatthana Sutta
Date & Time : February 6th, B.E. 2554 (2011), 10:00 – 11.30 A.M.
Speaker: Anagarika Tevijjo (Ajarn David Holmes)
Moderator: Dr. Chris Stanford
Rapporteur: Suttinee Yavaprapas

This is a follow-up session to Anagarika Tevijjo's lecture presented on November 7th, 2010. Ajarn David summed up his last lecture which he compiled and edited entitled: The Direct Path for the Purification of Beings — Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, The Four Foundations of Mindfulness as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi based on the text as initially translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli. Ajarn David further said the text with some Explicatory Insertions could be downloaded at www.theravada-dharma.org. The word "Satipatthana" is the name for an approach to meditation aimed at establishing Sati, or mindfulness. The true way is the eightfold noble path based on the four noble truths, leading to Nibbana. Precisely, the most clear and direct path for the purification of beings is any phenomenon which we want to cling to arises and passes away. This is true for the body, the feeling, the mind and all phenomena.

The Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi has explained the tight focus of investigation of the Satipatthana Sutta [in a nutshell], writing (on page 5): ... "at the close-end of the spectrum, the Buddha's teaching discloses the radical impermanence uncovered only by sustained attention to experience in its living immediacy: the fact that all the constituents of our being, bodily and mental, are in constant process, arising and passing away in rapid succession from moment to moment without any persistent underlying substance. In the very act of observation they are undergoing "destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing" (MN 74.11)."

Ajarn David tried to explain the afore-mentioned Buddha's teachings by taking each of the individual words of the above sentences as inter-dependent terms and analyzing and explicating their inter-related meanings as follows:

1 the Buddha's teaching discloses the radical impermanence

The radical impermanence means the impermanence of any phenomena broken down into its tiniest elements. In the blink of an eye, millions and millions of tiny units of energy are appearing and disappearing at the same time. It is energy that keeps the body going. There are no phenomena whatever in the world that has any impermanence which could be measured by science.

The word "radical" here means so fast that it is incomprehensible. Nothing is abiding. There is no such thing as existing. The description of the radical impermanence depends upon the word "happening". Small units in the body are exploding. And that is energy that keeps the machine going. We have the body and we have engine. We have the breath and we have all the parts that we need. We keep inventing mental solutions to problems we had to make life more comfortable. The brain is like the computer CPU. It comes in to the heart and all the messages are sent through the body. A lot of data go to the brain and the brain goes through functions. Then the body and everything all go except we cannot destroy energy. Energy goes to the level of the same frequency of energy somewhere in the cosmos. When the body goes, the mind continues. The level of mind is so high that the mind energy will go in a higher plane. We should hence be purifying the mind by doing things that lead to harmlessness. The mind is then developing. Energy will go around and around. It takes time to understand rebirth especially peoples from the western world.

2 the radical impermanence uncovered only by sustained attention

Sustained attention means attention to everything in life. It also means attention to the breath. Every action that we do should be controlled and examined. It should lead to comfort of mind and ultimately to joy and happiness. We learn it through sustained attention. The mind is always disturbed by something. There is a mind watching the mind. When everything comes in the mind whether we like it or not, the mind reacts. This is sustained attention to the actions of mind. We have to develop a capacity of mind to be able to know what is happening and understand the sustained attention and bring it to the mind.

3 to experience in its living immediacy

What does experience mean? Experience in its living immediacy actually means in the moment, one-pointedness. Experience starts with the breath. Everybody approaches breath differently. Some people would take 3 breathes and establish mindfulness. And then hold on to that mindfulness. Ajarn David himself concentrates on the breath. For Vipassana, we need a strong foundation in the breath. And then we need the contemplation of phenomena which can help us to achieve wisdom. When we control the mind, the breath is always focused.

At this juncture, Ulrich Lippelt mentioned about his experience in meditation. At the beginning, he is aware of the breath. However, he does not concentrate on the action of the breath moving in and out. He concentrates on what is still in him.

Ajarn David said he felt Mudita for his success. He made comments that no two individual human beings can ever have the same experience because arising factors and conditions are different.

4 the fact that all the constituents of our being, bodily and mental, are in constant process, arising and passing away in rapid succession from moment to moment

This is the realization about the continuation of Dukkha. Everything is continuing. Chris reinstated that no one person can have experience the same twice. Since we do not repeat the same experience, we should examine each experience very carefully and take away from it.

5 without any persistent underlying substance

Persist means continue to be. In other word, being is always said that actions are burning out. We go through life and the best thing we can do is avoid any action which is hostile to us. We really have to pay attention i.e to see things on one way or the other. Mara or the temptation can get in at the same moment. According to Ajarn David, everything is a process going on.

6 In the very act of observation they are undergoing “destruction, vanishing, fading away, and ceasing

That means the potential Kusala and Akusala. It is a matter of whatever comes to our mind unendingly and leads to the unsatisfactory life. In this connection, Ulrich talked about concentrating on the process of Anijja, impermanence, which creates Dukkha. Since we concentrate on repeating and not repeating, it is all a matter of constantly unending. And that is our unsatisfactory life because we can never come to terms with it. If we can manage to get away from the experience by concentrating on stillness, then we can achieve a reduction.

Chris then summed up that we have never experienced anything lasting. Everything is changing. The matter is how we react to experience in life. Our reaction to changes creates our Dukkha. The message of the Buddha is to overcome Dukkha and anything which serves it.

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