

13 THE OUTFLOWINGS OF THE MIND

12th September 2000

When you go outside at this time of the year the full moon is very close. It's the second full moon of the rains retreat. Two months have passed since the start of the retreat and the mind should have slowed down by now. A lot of business has been got out of the way. Because of the continuous inclination of the mind towards peaceful states there should now be some experience of those peaceful states.

The Endless Task

The inclination of the mind is all-important. Very often the mind inclines in the wrong direction. It goes out into the world of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. It even goes to thoughts about those experiences, to what we call the echoes of worldly life that happen in the thinking mind: dreams, fantasies and memories. With all of these we are observing the things of the world. In contrast, the inclination of the mind inwards is the way to develop the 'letting go' of the world. When we talk about the 'letting go' or the 'fading away' of the world, we can look at that from many different aspects. We understand how the inclination of the mind inwards brings the mind into a focus.

The inclination of the mind outwards is called *papañca* in Pāli. There are so many different things to do and so many different objects to pay attention to. It's the world of endless busyness. There's no end to that proliferation or the complexity of that world of *papañca*. On the other hand, the mind that inclines inwards into the present moment, the silence, the breath, the *nimmitta*, and the *jhānas*, is the mind which knows the end of *papañca*. The mind can know the end of proliferation, the end of busyness, and the end of complexity, as it gets closer to unity, to oneness.

The inclination of the mind inwards is one of the perceptions that can be developed in this monastery. Whenever you catch the mind going outwards it is a manifestation of what in the Dhamma we call the *āsavas*, the out-flowings of the mind. The *āsavas* come from the mind and go out to explore the world. That 'going out' to explore the world is where we get caught in *saṃsāra*; always wanting to experience new

sensations and new delights. Very often people in the world find that no matter where they travel, no matter where they go, or what they experience, there is always something more. So it's an endless task, an endless journey, if one follows the journey by going outwards into the world. However, by noticing that movement of the mind that goes outwards rather than inwards, one can know for oneself the meaning of this term *āsava* in Buddhism.

The Trouble Makers

The Buddha taught three *āsavas*: *kāmāsava*, *bhavāsava*, and *avijjāsava*. *Kāmāsava* is the mind that goes out to the world of the five senses, or to their echoes in the mind, playing around, trying to find sustenance, trying to find satisfaction. Anyone with an ounce of wisdom should be able to know by now that no matter where you go in that world, there can never be satisfaction. There can never be peace. You can never be full of contentment. The very powerful simile that the Buddha gave for the world of the senses is that the world is forever burning; it promises so much but never gives you what it promises.

There is also the simile of the dog that is thrown a bone covered with blood. It's got the taste of food, the smell of food, but that bone smeared with blood cannot satisfy the dog's hunger. It tastes nice, it looks good, but in the end the dog is hungry, perhaps even more hungry and disappointed than it was at the beginning. And so it is with the sensory pleasures. The Buddha said sensory pleasures give you a little happiness, but a lot of dissatisfaction, a lot of trouble, and a lot of turmoil.

So, you should know that the *āsavas* that go out to play with the world of the five senses are troublemakers. They are things that take away the peace and contentment of the mind. The mind will never reach the goal because basically it is going in the wrong direction.

Bhavāsava goes out into the world just to prove existence. To justify existence, we have to do something, make something, and be somebody. If you ever find yourself going out into the world for that reason you should understand that it is another *āsava*, another out-flowing, which takes you away from the core, away from truth, and away

from peace. The will ‘to be’ is a form of *papañca* that creates much turmoil and many problems in our world. It takes you out to try and achieve some fame or status. It makes you defend yourself when you think that other people are criticising you. These are all the movements of the mind that try to say ‘I am’. *Bhavāsava*, is taking you in the wrong direction. It’s affirming existence, affirming being, rather than going in the opposite direction of ‘letting go’.

With and *avijjāsava* the mind goes out because of delusion. It’s stupid to want to go out into the world. How much do you need in this world? Sometimes as the abbot of a monastery I have to be very careful because if most of the monks in the monastery are *puthujjanas*, it’s so easy for them to want more and more, whether it’s heaters, coolers, or walking meditation paths. For example, sooner or later, when we have roads through the monastery, we might even be able to have meals on wheels and take the food to each monk’s hut. Then you would only have to come outside to put your bowl out. You wouldn’t even need to come to the *sālā* (hall). We could have a P.A. system for the chanting, so that you could chant *anumodanā* into a microphone and all the lay people could hear you. Whatever it is, *papañca* can do this endlessly, but it misses the point. The point is that trying to make everything comfortable, stable, and easy is just the mind going out into the world.

The Present Moment

It’s so easy to make plans in the mind, to plan the perfect monastery, the perfect hut. It is so easy to plan the perfect hermitage, but that is going out into the world, that’s *kāmāsava*. It’s much better in a monastery such as this, which is comfortable enough as it is, to go into your hut as much as you can. You go into the hut and into simplicity. The Buddha taught *santutṭhi* as part of the gradual training. It means contentment with little, contentment with what you have. It doesn’t matter if it’s the best; it’s good enough. What’s the purpose of the food? What’s the purpose of the hut? What’s the purpose of all your requisites? The purpose is not to win an award for the best monastery in the world. The purpose of all this is not to have tourists coming around and saying how beautiful the monastery is, or how wonderful your hut is. The purpose of these requisites is to give you the opportunity to let go by providing the basic needs of the body, so that you don’t need to be so concerned with

all that goes on outside. The whole purpose of a monastery such as this is to try and lessen the busyness of the world.

By following the *āsavas* into the world we make more busyness for others and for ourselves. But we can lessen that busyness by saying, ‘this is good enough’. Your hut is good enough. The monastery is good enough and the walking path is good enough. Sure, it could be better but it’s good enough. Doing that takes away a lot of the busyness in our lives. Sometimes we need to say, ‘this day is good enough’. For those of you who are planning to leave this monastery after the rains retreat, you haven’t left yet. That’s in the far distant future. You may never leave. You may die in this monastery. All those plans and the mind going off into the future are a great waste of time. It is wasting the opportunity to practise today, because you are busy planning for tomorrow.

Often we do not have enough time in our lives, but the reason why people haven’t enough time is because they throw time away. The way of practice in a monastery is to do walking meditation and sitting meditation most of the time. When walking, don’t waste the time by thinking of things that don’t really concern you. I’m talking here about the thoughts of tomorrow or the next day. Even thoughts of later on in the evening don’t really concern you. The only thing that concerns you is the present moment and what’s happening now. Try and go into that present moment more and more.

People have sometimes told me that they have a problem with present moment awareness. They are not quite sure what they should be aware of, what they should be focussing on, or what they should be doing. It’s just a matter of being acquainted with what that present moment really is. Once you make a good acquaintance with the present moment it’s easy to focus on it. If you’re not quite sure what it is, or you feel uncomfortable, then of course it will be difficult.

Notice that the *āsavas* that flow out of the mind, away from the ‘here and now’, always seeking for something else, are a force in the mind, a movement of the mind. You can ask the question, ‘Why does my mind want to flee from the present moment, from what it has right now, from this? Why does my mind want to go fleeing off into

the future, to fantasies, to the past, or to dreams? Why does it want to do this? What's wrong with this present moment?' That which is going out doesn't even know what the present moment is. You see that the mind is not looking in the right direction. It's not looking inwards at what's here. The mind is looking outwards to what might be. That's called craving and craving is always blind. It's blind to what you have and it only sees what's missing or what you might have in the future. That's the delusive part of craving.

Ill will is the same. When you're angry with someone you do not realise what your mind is like. You are just worrying about the thing or the person over there. The mind is going out. It forgets what's inside. A very effective and beautiful way to stop that type of outgoing mind is to notice the movement, the flow of consciousness out into the world, onto the person or the object of your anger. Notice the mind going out to the future, to the past, into fantasies and dreams, and the world of thoughts. You will realise you've missed the point, the point of the 'now', the inner point of the mind. As soon as you recognise that movement of the mind, it is quiet easy to turn that current of consciousness around. Instead of going out into the world and searching and reaching out you can turn the mind inwards.

Going Against the Stream

What is doing the reaching out? What's hearing? What's feeling? What's seeing? What is it that's saying, thinking, and doing? To find that out you have to go inwards. In Pāli the word for wise attention is *yoniso manasikāra*; it literally means the work of the mind that goes to the source. The *yonī* is the womb, the origin. It doesn't go out into the world; it goes in where this world is coming from or where this mind is coming from. The mind is similar to a soldier fighting the enemies of craving and desire. Where does all of this actually come from? *Yoniso manasikāra* goes in the opposite direction to the *āsavas*. It goes against the stream, against the flow of the world. That's the reason why the metaphor of going against the stream is a very common one in the Dhamma taught by the Lord Buddha.

The Buddha taught us to go against the stream of craving, against the *āsavas*, against the movement of the mind to the sensory world, and the world of being, and instead to

go inwards, in the opposite direction. It takes a lot of training to be able to do that. That is the training in the five *indriyas*, especially the first *indriya*, confidence and faith, *saddhā*. Confidence and faith also means having patience, giving it time, giving it all the time it needs. If you read the Theragāthā, you will find that some of the monks, for instance Anuruddha, spent many, many years practising before they became Stream Winners. It took them many more years before they became *Arahants*. These were great monks with the best of teachers, the Lord Buddha himself. It took them a long time, but they had patience and persistence and *anyone with patience and persistence must reach the goal eventually*. If you have faith, *saddhā*, it's only a matter of time before you see that what the Buddha taught is true. If you have confidence that there are *Ariyas* in the world, and you have confidence in them, then you know that if you practise the Eightfold Path it leads to *Nibbāna*. If you're practising the Eightfold Path, and following the instructions, you know where it leads. It's only a matter of time.

It's not up to you. It's a process, a condition, cause and effect. It's wonderful when you realize *anattā* (no-self) and realize that it's not up to the person. It's just a process independent of any ego or any self. So whether you say, "I can't do it", "I can do it", "I'm up to it", "I'm not up to it", the 'I' doesn't come into it. It's a process, that's all. All the conditions are here for you, so it's only a matter of time. Having that sort of confidence, having that sort of faith, is what powers the mind to go against the stream, against the out-flowings, and instead go inwards.

The Russian Dolls

The tendency of people is to go out into the world. When any problem arises in their practice or their meditation, they blame something outside of themselves, like the teacher, the monastery, this monk, that *anagārika*, the food, the climate, or even their bodies. That's just going out into the world again. Don't go out into the world, instead go inside. One can always go 'in' no matter what the problem or difficulty is. Don't go out to the problem. Go against the stream, *yoniso manasikāra*, go inwards. What is experiencing the problem? What is making this decision? What is this 'doer'? What is this 'knower'? Going inside is going in the right direction and you should understand that the going inwards is precisely the path of meditation which is

taught here. Going into the present moment, going into the silence, which is right in the centre of the present moment.

If you're clearly, perfectly present you haven't the time to say anything. All speech is about what has just happened or about what might happen next. You can't say anything about what's happening now. So, to gain that silence, I just cultivate present moment awareness, cultivating it and refining it until it becomes silent. Silence just arises right in the centre of 'present moment awareness' and that silence is like a huge room into which I invite the breath. I don't go out to the breath. That again is an *āsava*; a movement of the mind. If you go out to the breath, you'll find the breath is uncomfortable and difficult to perceive. If you can make the mind go inwards to the present moment, inwards into the silence, and then invite the breath in you'll find the breath will come in by itself. It'll be in the room of silence. You're actually going into the centre of that silent room where the breath lives.

With each of these stages of meditation, the next stage arises from the very centre of the stage you are in now. You don't need to go on to something else. You don't need to get rid of this experience now. You don't need to suppress the *āsavas* or encourage the mind to go onto the next stage, 'Come on, go quicker, achieve more, come on, go on'. That's the wrong direction. Go inwards with no craving and no desire for something else. Just develop contentment, letting go as you go inwards, into the breath, not out to the breath.

If you have that inclination to go inwards, that which is experiencing the breath gets closer to the centre. You're letting go of this external outward shell of existence. You're letting go of the body. You've already let go of the world outside. Imagine this inner world as a series of concentric shells, like the famous Russian dolls, one inside of the other. You have the world outside and in the middle of that is your body. Get rid of the body and in the middle of that is the breath. In the middle of the breath is the *nimmitta*. All we are doing is going inwards. So if any of you have had trouble, wondering what to do when you're concentrated on the breath, just nudge the mind inwards a little more. Direct the mind inwards, into this experience, inwards into this moment, further into the silence, further into the breath. When you really get into that a lot of pleasure and happiness arise. It's just the pleasure and happiness that

arise with the release of that world outside. It is happiness that arises from the release of this body and the five senses. You have to go right inside this body to find that release. You won't find it outside.

Once you've trained yourself in the direction of always going inward, looking inward, going into your hut, into your meditation, into the moment, into the silence, into the breath, you very easily get into the 'beautiful breath'. It's natural to have this happen when you're going in the correct direction. If, when you get to the breath, you're neither going inwards nor outwards but just staying with that breath, it won't develop anymore. So try and go inwards to the present moment, closer to the silence. With the mind going inwards you soon get to the 'beautiful breath'. It's only a matter of time before you go right into the centre of that beautiful breath. The breath is like one of those soft centred chocolates: the sweet part, the happiness of the breath, lies right in the centre of it. As you go to the centre, the breath disappears. The simile that I give in meditation retreats is the one about meditators being tested for their concentration by having to shoot an arrow through the eye of a stuffed bird. The last student is being asked by the meditation master, "Can you see the bird in the tree?" "What tree?" "Can you see the bird?" "What bird?" "What can you see then?" "I can only see one eyeball."

He'd focussed so much inwards that all he could see, his only field of perception, was the target.

Now you can go even further inwards. By being with the 'beautiful breath', go into the beauty. The beauty is *pītisukha*. You can't stop there; you have to go right into the *pītisukha*, falling inwards. That's the experience of many people who get a *nimmitta* and then enter a *jhāna*. You fall into the centre of the beautiful light of the *nimmitta*, letting it embrace and go all around you, staying there, and even going deeper. You are always inclining inwards, until you go through all the *jhānas*. You go so far in that you get to the very heart of things, to cessation. Then you will know

that the core of all this is ‘emptiness’. There is no ‘self’, there is no ‘doer’, and there is no ‘knower’. There is only empty phenomena rolling along.

Know the Truth

Going right inwards, you get insight. You don’t get insights in the realm of the five senses and the world outside. You don’t get insights by just watching the breath. You get insights when you see deeply into the very heart, the very centre of all of this. One inclines deeper and sees the beautiful cessation, which is a wonderful experience. People in the world are afraid of cessation because they think of it as destruction, as annihilation, not understanding or appreciating its beauty. That’s the reason some people in the world, if they have only a little understanding of Buddhism, think of it as like suicide or death. But those people who have practised the path and know the truth, know that as one gets deeper and deeper, more profundity, joy, and happiness are experienced.

The *āsavas* cause *dukkha*. They are *dukkha*. They are suffering. They are going out into the world making busyness for you. It’s like going out into a fire, into a storm, or into the cold and the wind and the rain. It’s going out from the cosy comfortable place within yourself. The more you can go inwards, the more happiness you will feel, and that gives you a marvellous understanding of the power of the Four Noble Truths and how deep their meaning is. The deeper one goes inwards, and the more one goes against the *āsavas*, the more happiness and pleasure one experiences, and the more one will be inclined to go deeper and deeper on the path of ever increasing happiness. After a while it is not a path of struggle or a path which requires much effort, because the inclination to go deeper becomes a causal process and is self-sustaining.

One goes inwards more and more deeply just for the happiness of it, for the sheer profundity of it. Each one of you who’ve gone deep inside, gone against the *āsavas*, know that the deeper you’ve gone the more peaceful, joyful, and more profound the experience is. You’ve come closer to truth and wisdom. You know that is the path. There is some insight, some wisdom in the mind, that knows that that’s the way to go. It is *yoniso manasikāra*, the mind working to go deeper and deeper inwards. Cultivate

that. Incline towards that. Don't cultivate and incline towards the world outside. So many people have done that and just wasted their time. Cultivate the inner yearning, the inner abidings, and the movement of the mind against the *āsavas*. When you go that deep, and find there's nothing there, you will have cut off the very root of the *āsavas* and also the reason why you go out into the world. You will have cut off the *avijjāsava*, the cause of the out-flowings, the illusion of a 'self' – the 'me' that has to do something in this world, engage with the world, and justify its existence in the world by 'doing' and 'achieving'. When you can cut that off then the mind will always incline against the world and go inwards.

So remember the meaning of the *āsavas*. Understand them as movements of the mind which go out into the world. Notice when those *āsavas* are there in your mind. See if you can counteract them by developing and training yourself to be a person who inclines inwards, into more solitude, into more seclusion, into the present moment, into the subtle breath, into more silence, into more bliss, into emptiness.

Cut off those *āsavas* and then you'll be free.