



# Seeing Things As They Really Are

## The method of Vipassana meditation

By Ruth Denison

It is wonderful that we are together here, exploring healing the mind. That is what I teach, and invite people to turn to; healing or training the mind. "Mind" is a most ambiguous term. We talk about "empty mind", "universal mind", and we can talk from the psychological points of view. We can talk about "your" mind, and "my" mind, about the "conditioned" mind. So, we speak of many minds.

What is mind? Where is it? We know that it is with us and that it is for communicating. Also, it gives us experiences. The mind lets us hear, think, emote, see, feel, smell, and taste. So, the mind is everything we do. It is, so to speak, "lord" in our life.

We have come here to talk about healing the mind, so that indicates that the way our mind lets us experience our life is not quite satisfying, not quite healthy. When we talk about healing, that means there is some sickness. The mind does not serve us well. We do not feel well with it. We want to find out about healing the mind so that it can serve us better.

I want to talk about a form of healing or cleansing the mind which comes from the teaching of the Buddha. It is a very ancient, proven method, by which he came to complete health of the mind, to total vision and clarity about the nature of the mind process. His method is seeing clearly who and what we are, and how we make things wrong in ourselves.

It is a way to come to clear vision, to understand the nature of existence. That we want to "heal" it, shows that we do not understand it correctly. Healing does not mean giving it medicine. The mind is intangible. We cannot give it anything from the outside. It has to be brought into understanding and balance, where it can heal itself through its own effort.

The mind has within it its own understanding that there is something wrong, something to be recognized: because the "sickness" is brought about by the mind itself, by not understanding itself. Seeing clearly, then, is the method that I invite you to use to come to balance in the mind, which will enable us to see very clearly the sickness and condition in which we live, and the cause for it. Seeing things as they really are, in the way we express our life, in the way we



relate in our life, in that very seeing and understanding, is the healing process.

Doing this means relying on our own effort and ability to see in such a way that we are free from all judgements, prejudices, thoughts, and interpretations. The mind has to be brought to an exquisite balance, where it no longer feels the need to act on craving and aversion.

I have nothing to offer. I cannot give you any ritual, any tool. I can only invite you to come to a balance in your mind by which you are able to see, in this very moment, without any interpretations, to know what is occurring in the mind: to just be present in the moment, in the beauty of your being. When we can provide this balance in ourselves through mindfulness, it is supported by faculties like right effort, the willingness of your heart to investigate, and by calm and equanimity. These faculties are, in fact, the heart.

When we open our heart, we fall into a space of tolerance, love, and kindness, where we are just there for what life is presenting, without resistance, without pushing it away, without wanting any-

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thing. That is the quality of mind which I invite people to cultivate. This method of cultivating the mind is the teaching of the Buddha, the heart of the Buddha. This attitude provides equanimity, calm, and compassion.

This mindfulness enables these qualities to function and mature. When they have matured, we have freedom from all our burdens, from bondage to pain, craving, and sorrow. Pain may still be there (as some pain is intrinsic to life), but our mental attitude becomes so spacious and endowed with understanding of the nature of our lives, that we accept it. We then have the tolerance and love to see life as it really is: containing pain and hardship. The causes for it are mostly our insistence and desire to have it otherwise, our inability to accept life as it is.

The more one reflects about this practice of mindfulness, the clearer it becomes. We allow space for certain qualities in our mind to mature, bringing about cessation of suffering. The beauty of it is that with such clarity, non-interference, calm, and balance, we can see what is happening in the moment. Resistance arises (pain and depression), but where there is no interference, it is a very loving atmosphere for anything that is noticed, and in that openness the pain and sickness can heal. It is like the love and care of a mother for her only child, and in this whole life can be healed.

Our life is body and mind, so we observe it with this non-interfering attitude when it breathes, walks, bends down, sits, or lies down. We come to understand the body's nature: change, constant movement from one thing to the next. On the level of sensation, we discover that nothing is solid. All is in flux.

Then, there is the area to be observed which exerts a very broad control over our life. That is the atmosphere which we call "pleasant" and "unpleasant". In this training, it is important to understand when we are reacting to these things. We crave when it is pleasant. When it is not pleasant, we avoid, we push the world away. When we allow the arising of that which is pleasant to simply be in our attention, we stop further desires and craving. In the same way, if we permit attention to the unpleasant, our tendency to plunge into aversion is diminished. And this balance is very healing.

It must be understood that the healing space is happening in our own mind. There is nothing from outside. We have to come into the rhythm of allowing that space in us, which balances all aspects of the mind. This takes time. In the beginning it is hard because of the enormous disturbances we have in our minds. Because of the tendency to react to the pleasant and unpleasant, there is not enough balance, calmness, or acceptance of things as they are. Because our mind seeks excitement and stimulation, making these efforts can, at times, be boring. So we have to bring forth these efforts again and again. That is, observ-

ing these tendencies of pleasant and unpleasant.

We also begin to understand how mind, when it is not observed and not in balance, creates our unhealthiness and suffering. How can we get hold of the cause for unhealthiness? The tool is nothing but a space in the mind that is already there. It is a self-illuminating process. You look, and you look again. You look to body and mind, to what they do from moment to moment. The patterns by which we create our suffering become clear. In that very recognition, healing takes place.

So this practice illuminates itself by cultivating the state of mindfulness and bringing attention to bodily expression, to its breath, sensations, emotions, and thoughts which we always experience. We also bring attention to the pleasant and unpleasant feelings which drive us and determine how we relate to the world and to our mind.

The mind also has a quality of knowing, which brings about understanding in the intellect and transforms it into comprehending what to do next. We have this wisdom in ourselves, and together with the aspect of investigation, we come to see what is true about ourselves. We see that there is constant change on both the mental and physical levels. In seeing and experiencing this quality of impermanence, we begin to understand the unsolidity of our life. Everything changes. There is nothing to hold onto.

The "I", or ego, we have lived with disappears as we see a process of change and unsolidity. We recognize our wrong identification. Mind is apt to hold onto this misconception of having "I" as a separate entity. We see here our decep-

tion: relating to a sense of "I" compels us to express ourselves in all kinds of unwholesomeness and suffering.

All the methods that are presented here today are directed toward the same goal, but with different ways of coming to it. The way of practice that comes from the Buddha's teaching is simple, but not easy. It is because we have to pull ourselves up and make effort to provide this space in ourselves; kind and loving, receptive without rejection and aversion. If we remind ourselves, we can live this way in every moment; when standing, sitting, eating, breathing, moving, and thinking.

So, the medicine is mindfulness. And with diligent practice it is no longer a method, but becomes a way of life. You continuously reconnect yourself to what is happening in this very moment in body and mind. This brings joy and a feeling of accomplishment. Why? Because you are in connection with things as they really are. You always see in this moment what is occurring, and in the open mindfulness you are able to accept everything as it is. Even if it is very uncomfortable, you go slow and live it through, because now you have this strength in the mind for doing so. You can deal with life with balance and harmony.

In that very looking at what arises in the moment in body and mind, the intelligence knows what to do next. In whatever moment you find yourself, you have this presence, this self-illuminating aspect, always telling you what to do next. It is supported by your diligent investigation, by your burning desire to get out of suffering. It is supported by calm and equanimity, by concentration and attention. You know in the moment what you see and what the answer to your question is. You just need to sit and allow this mindfulness.

It is a joy to live with this self-illuminating mind, but the difficulty is how to do it, how to get out of the extremely uncomfortable stuff we are in. We get run over by our emotions, our negative thoughts. By simply being attentive to all of this, they become our teacher.

It is as if you were cultivating in your body the divine principle. The end of it is the truer being, the goddess, or god in us, if you like. It is not outside of you. For it is your purified mind, or wisdom. Wisdom knows the nature of existence, which is impermanence. It understands our mortality, the fleetingness of our lives. It understands that suffering and dissatisfaction have something to do with refusing to look at this fact that we are not eternal, that there is change in us.

Then, this strong and purified mind is nothing with which to create suffering and sickness. It is nice to live like that. There is a self-sufficient happiness in it. It is difficult in the beginning, but when it catches on, if you are trained enough, it can sit up in you and guide you. This all-seeing invites you, moment to moment, to be awake and in that awakened state, the healing takes place. □

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