

# **A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF VIPASSANA MEDITATION, THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH, AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**

By Ven. U. Janaka

*A really brief but dexterous exposition of a subject that could occupy volumes.*

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*Ed.*

Happiness and peace are goals of all religions, and in Buddhism this is no different. However, the Buddhist approach is different. From the Buddhist point of view, the world is suffering (*dukkha*). This must be thoroughly realized by anyone who wishes to attain peace and happiness through the Buddhist path. If the aspirant has not realized suffering, he will not be able to realize peace and happiness. Most do not understand or realize suffering. They need self-realization; they must be willing to observe their own bodily and mental phenomena as they really are.

Defilements are the cause of *dukkha*. These are lust, greed, desire, anger, conceit, jealousy, among others; however, the main root is attachment. Attachment is the result of the false view of self, personality, and individuality. When the mind associates bodily and mental phenomena with a self, person, or individual, then the desire for being rich, wealthy, and high-ranking arises. When the body is burdened with such defilements, *dukkha* arises. Thus, we must do away with the concept of self, soul, personality, or individual being. We must extinguish this false idea. If we observe mental and physical phenomena as they really are, devoid of self or person, there can be cessation of suffering, and we can live happily and peacefully.

The Lord Buddha taught us the path for the extinction of the concept of self in the *Satipatthana-sutta* (The Presence of Mindfulness). We must be mindful of any and all mental and bodily processes. First, we must know the meditation technique properly. Without proper effort (*Samma vayama*), we cannot focus the mind on any mental or physical process. Then the mind gains awareness and right mindfulness (*Samma sati*). When it becomes constant, powerful, and

the mind becomes concentrated there is right concentration (*Samma samadhi*). One of the mental states leads the mind to the object of meditation and there is right thought (*Samma sankappa*). Now the mind becomes more concentrated on the object of meditation. Insight penetrates into the true nature of bodily and mental processes as they really are. One gains right understanding (*Samma ditthi*) of phenomena as they really occur. Then there is no misunderstanding of any thought or process, whether physical or mental. This understanding can be attained only through meditation. When we take the five or eight precepts prior to meditation, we are endowed with morality (*sila*). When we are meditating, we are abstaining from wrong speech, deeds and livelihood. This is a practical explanation of right speech (*Samma vaca*), right deeds (*Samma kammanta*), and right livelihood (*Samma ajiva*). When well concentrated, the mind is not hindered by the five *Nivaranas* (lust, anger, torpor and languor, restlessness and worry, doubts). Then the mind is purified, insight becomes penetrating and we gain insight into the true nature of mental and physical phenomena.

For example, the meditator notes pain. Pain is a mental sensation, not a physical sensation. The meditator focuses the mind on the pain. It seems stronger. This occurs because the meditator refers the pain to himself and to his person. When the meditator's intelligence becomes penetrating, he can distinguish between pain and the mind that notes it. He can distinguish this only when the mind is concentrated. He realizes that there are just two processes – pain and the mind that notes it. Therefore, he does not associate pain with the self. There is detachment. He is no longer unhappy with pain because he no longer associates pain with self. This is right understanding (*Samma ditthi*).

When pain arises, the mind notes it. When pain disappears, the mind notes this. Then the meditator realizes impermanence (*anicca*). He notes these processes rapidly; processes arise rapidly and pass away rapidly. Then the meditator experiences that this is bad. This is *dukkha* caused by impermanence (*sankhara-dukkha*). There is also ordinary suffering. For example, the physical pain experienced by the meditator is known as *dukkha-dukkha*. When the meditator experiences joyful states during or out of meditation, this also leads to *dukkha*. Such states do not last long and give rise to unhappiness. This is *dukkha* produced by change (*viparinama-dukkha*). As the meditator sees these processes arising and passing away, he realizes that there is no self, person, or individual. This is no-self (*anatta*). Thus, he has experienced the three characteristics of existence: *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*. There is no self. When he sees unpleasant things, there is no unhappiness. When he sees pleasant things, there is no attachment. He feels detachment or equanimity. Thus, he has uprooted attachments (*tanha*). This has resulted in the partial cessation or extinction (*nirodha*) of suffering, which is *Nibbana*.

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