

Arising & Passing Away

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There are two qualities you want to bring to meditation. One is tranquility; the other is clear seeing. The Pali terms are *samatha* and *vipassana*. Over the centuries, these two have been separated into separate techniques, two different ways of meditating. But in the Buddha's teachings he puts them together. They're qualities of mind that bring you to right concentration, and through right concentration they bring you to right view, and through right view they can bring you to release. So you want to work on both of them.

The question you're supposed to ask of someone who's good at tranquility, if you find that you're not so good at it, is: "How do you get the mind to settle down? How do you get it to settle in so that it becomes one with its object?" There are lots of ways of doing this. The most standard one is to focus on the breath, to watch the breath to gain a sense of when it's long, when it's short, and how it feels when it's long, when it's short so that you can adjust it. From there you can go to deep or shallow, heavy or light. There are lots of ways of analyzing the breath and being sensitive to the way it affects the body, all the way to the question of: Where you feel the breathing? Where does it feel like the energy is coming into the body? Where does it feel like it's going out? Do you squeeze it out too much when you breathe out? Do you make it too tight when you breathe in? Try to get as sensitive as possible to how this feels. The more sensitive you are, the easier it is to settle down.

Then you learn how to watch over it so that, as it settles in, you don't get so excited that you tip it over. You look after it, tend to it, so that it feels comfortable, feels at home. In fact, that's one of the Pali terms for your meditation theme: *viharadhamma*, a home for the mind. It feels right to be here. Let your awareness fill the body so that your home here has a good solid foundation. And try to be aware of the breath as it fills the body. You can adjust it here and adjust it there so that the breathing process feels good all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-, and from in and out to in and out to in and out. Just keep on going. That's how you get the mind to settle down.

The questions you bring to someone who's good at clear seeing are: "How are fabrications to be viewed? How are they to be seen with clear insight?" This is where the Buddha's definition of discernment comes in. He says, discernment means seeing things arising and passing away in a way that's penetrating and leads to the right ending of suffering. There's a lot to unpack there, because you can see

things arising and passing away and say, “Okay, I see things arising and passing away, big deal. I see it all the time.” But how do you do it in such a way that it’s penetrating? How do you do it in such a way that leads to the end of suffering? That goes deeper.

The question you have to pose in your mind is: When you see things arising and passing away, when do you notice that there’s suffering arising and passing away or stress arising and passing away? That’s what you’ve got to look for. You’ll find that the answers you give will change in line with how sensitive you are, and the sensitivity has a lot to do with your concentration, with your tranquility. After all, the more sensitive you are to the breath, the more you’ll be aware of things that are irritating. They might be very minor irritants, but as you’re doing your work with the meditation, you want to clear them all out. In the process of doing that, you begin to see, “Oh, this has more stress than that. The level of stress just went up. The level of stress just went down. What happened when it went up and when it went down?”

That’s the other part of seeing arising and passing away in a penetrating way: seeing the connections. After all, the Buddha’s teachings on dependent co-arising didn’t come just from saying, “Okay, arising and passing away, arising and passing away, what else? That’s it.” It’s not “that’s it.” Watching arising and passing away, you should also hold in mind the question, “Okay, what else is arising and passing away together?” This is where actual insight comes in. You begin to see connections. In fact, a lot of insight works on this principle: You look at one thing but then you end up noticing something else that’s around it.

Like with the contemplation of the body: We can go through the 32 parts we’ve chanted over and over again, and why do we do that? Is there anything wrong with the body? Some people say, “Here, you’re saying bad things about the body. You’re making people develop a bad body image.” That’s not the point. The point is to notice that there are all these things in the body and yet we can still have the perception that the body is beautiful. It’s really persistent, really tenacious. You get doctors who work in hospitals who have to do autopsies. They can still go home and sleep with their spouses. What they see about the body in the hospital stays in the hospital. It’s like Las Vegas: Whatever happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. What they see when they have to take a corpse apart stays in the operating room. In fact, sometimes it doesn’t even go outside the operating room into the office. I know of a monk who visited a morgue one time and he noticed all these girlie calendars in the doctor’s office right next to where the autopsies were being performed.

The mind has this really tenacious desire to want to find the body attractive. We focus on the unattractive side of the body, not so much because there's anything wrong with the body. The problem lies with the desire and the perceptions that we apply to the body and what goes along with those perceptions. Why do we want it to look beautiful? Well, we have certain agendas around it. And one way to bring those agendas out into the open is to look at the body, take it apart in your mind, piece by piece by piece, and think of arranging the pieces. You could arrange them in nice little neat rows on the floor in front of you in your mind. Even then, you look at them and you say, "What is this? Is there anything that's really worthy of lusting for, worthy of identifying with?"

Some people are really proud of their particular skin color. Well, you take the skin off and put it in a pile: What's really great about it? Yet somehow you can put it back together in your mind very quickly and get very attached to it. The problem is not with the body, the problem is with the attachment. And a good way of seeing the attachment is to start taking things apart and then noticing what happens in the mind when you start putting them back together again. At what point does the body become attractive? At what point does it become an object of pride, an object of lust? It's those other things that arise and pass away: *Those* are the things that you really want to see. So a lot of the clear seeing is looking at one thing and seeing the things that are connected to it, seeing them out of the corner of your eye.

So when you see things arising and passing away, it's not just to say, "Okay, it's arising, it's passing away. So what?" It's seeing: "Where does the stress arise? Where does the stress pass away?" And then noticing: "What else is connected?"

You can do this with pain as well. When the mind has settled enough so that you can look at physical pain, you begin to see that it arises and passes away. Even just looking at the pure physicality of the pain or the pure pain-ness of the pain, you can begin to separate it out.

Say there's a pain in your neck. What else is there in the neck? Is there just pain? Well, no, there's earth, there's water, there's wind, there's fire. Which one of those things is the pain? It turns out, if you really look at them, that none of them are the pain. And when you can separate the pain especially from the earth element, you begin to see that it arises and passes away. It comes and goes, comes and goes. Sometimes its coming and going has to do with physical causes, and sometimes it has to do with mental causes. Particularly at the point where the pain becomes a burden on the mind, there's a mental cause. There's a perception that went along with the pain that aggravated your concern, your worry, your

identification with the pain. You begin to see that those perceptions come and go, come and go.

If you notice the coming and going, you can come to the point you say, “Okay, I can let go of the current one so that it doesn’t have to come back again.” Because you make up your mind that once this particular perception is gone, if you notice that it’s been causing the pain again and again and again—here we’re talking about mental pain—once you see the connection between the rise in the mental pain and that particular perception, you can make up your mind, “Okay, I’m not going to think that perception.” What’s going to happen then? The experience of the pain changes radically.

One of the strangest things that can happen is a sense that the pain goes away from the spot where it was in the body and actually goes *zip* into your heart and disappears. In which case you realize that there may have been a physical pain to begin with, but the mental perception actually maintained the pain even after the physical causes were gone. As soon as the mental perception was dropped, the pain went away.

Like those weird cases I heard about once or twice in Thailand of someone who had been possessed by a spirit and Ajaan Fuang had been asked to go check out the person, who was lying sick in bed. He didn’t do anything. He came back and told his students that the actual person had died. This other spirit had moved in. If you drove out the spirit, the body would die. In other words, the actual person was gone, but something else had moved in to keep the body animated for a while.

Well, the mind can do the same thing with physical pain. You move into a physical pain, get really upset about it, have a very clear perception of “Here is a pain right here,” and then the physical causes go away and yet the mental side of this keeps it as a pain.

Other times, when you drop the perception, the actual physical pain is still there, but you realize that you’ve cut the bridge, that even though there is physical pain in the body, it doesn’t have to pain the mind.

So the whole principle here is to see things arising and passing away, and to look for what else is arising and passing along with them. And where does this arising and passing away cause stress? Where does the stress arise, where does the stress pass away? It’s in seeing the connections: that’s what’s penetrating and leads to the right ending of stress.

Sometimes they say that seeing arising and passing away is a moment of awakening right there, but awakening is something very different. There is the description of the arising of the Dhamma Eye that happens at stream entry:

Whatever is subject to arising is also subject to passing away. *Yam kiñci samudaya-dhammam sabbam tam nirodha-dhammam ti*. The word *dhamma* in that sentence means *subject to*. It's like when we chant *Jara-dhammomhi*—I am subject to aging, I am subject to illness, I am subject to death. So whatever is subject to arising is also subject to passing away, all of it.

It sounds like you're just watching the arising and passing away. But no, the actual word is "subject to origination." And the origination means there is a connection, you want to see what else is there that causes it.

The other important word in that sentence is the *sabbam*: all, everything. Our normal way of watching things arising and passing away is to have a sense that there's somebody in here who's more lasting than the arising and passing that it's watching. Otherwise, it wouldn't be able to keep that theme in mind.

It's actually a form of concentration, watching the arising and passing away. There are stages of concentration—Ajaan Lee mentions them—in which you're not with a solid or single object but there is a sense of singleness in the mind because the mind is taking the arising and passing away as its theme of concentration. But ultimately, the insight into arising and passing away goes so thorough and so deep that you actually get back to the observer itself, realizing that this, too, has an intention that's driving it. The intention comes again and again and again. There's a momentary intention, it stops, and it's replaced by another one, which then stops. As long as you can keep repeating the same intention, you can stay with your object of concentration.

But as you peel away the various layers of arising and passing away and the various layers of stress, you finally begin to see that *everything* that arises and passes away is just stress arising, stress passing away. And that includes the intention that's driving all of this, both the object and the subject. When you can let go of the intention that's creating that sense of subject, then you experience something else entirely, something that doesn't arise, something that's not subject to origination, that's not subject to passing away.

It's from that perspective that you look back at everything else and say, "Oh, everything that was subject to origination has passed away, but this other dimension doesn't pass away, because it's not subject to origination."

So the arising of the Dhamma Eye is not just a moment of watching arising and passing away. It's something that goes a lot deeper and has a different impact. It's a different sort of experience entirely.

This means that it's not the case that just a moment of mindfulness or a moment of watching arising and passing away is the same as the moment of awakening. It's a very different kind of thing entirely. The act of watching arising

and passing away is a way of developing mindfulness, a way of developing concentration. Then, as you begin to see the connections, as you begin to see the causes and effects out of the corner of your eye, that's when it starts to get penetrating, that's when it can lead to the right ending of stress.

So the question is: What do you watch? Any of the themes that are among the factors of dependent co-arising—everything from fabrication in the mind to acts of consciousness, intentions, moments of attention, contact, feeling, perceptions, the physical elements in the body, the sense spheres, feelings, craving, clinging, becoming—any of these things. The problem is that you never know beforehand which of them is going to be the one that draws your attention and will really make a difference. So it's good to practice with different ones until you find something that really seems to get to the nub of the matter, the area where the mind is really fascinated, really obsessed with one particular kind of thing arising and passing away. Or one particular thing whose arising and passing away you haven't been able yet to see, when you suddenly realize, "Oh, this too arises and passes away, this too is subject to origination." That really seems to hit home.

There's a sutta where a monk goes round to visit other monks and asks them, "What do you have to focus on in order to gain awakening?" One monk says to focus on the five aggregates, another says to focus on the six sense spheres, others say to focus on dependent co-arising, the elements. Each monk has a different answer. This upsets the first monk. So he goes to see the Buddha: "Why did these monks all have such different answers?" And the Buddha says, "It's because at the moment when they gained insight, that was the topic they were focused on." You can focus on any of these topics, but you don't know beforehand which is the one that's going to work for you. So it's good to explore a bit.

You can start with the body, because we do have a lot of attachment around the body, and you may be surprised to see what some of your attachments are. When we analyze the body, say, in terms of the 32 parts, it's not that we're saying the body is bad, it's just that the Buddha wants the contemplation to have an effect on your mind. What happens to your mind when you do this analysis? Which parts don't like the analysis? Which parts object, feel threatened? Then watch that sense of feeling threatened come and go, and see what else comes and goes along with it. As I said, the body is not the problem. The problem comes from the mind's agendas around the body. And a good way of digging those agendas out and bring them into the light of day—because they do tend to operate on a subterranean level—is to start analyzing the body in this way to see what resists.

So these are some of the ways in which you bring both tranquility and insight to the meditation. As the Buddha said, some people find it easy to develop the tranquility and have to work harder at the insight. Others have an easy time analyzing things, but their minds don't really settle down. Some people find it easy to develop the two qualities together. Whichever sort you are, you know that ultimately you have to get both mastered. If you find yourself weak in one area, you focus on that so that you can bring both sides into balance. If the mind is steady enough so that you can see clearly, and it sees clearly enough so you can make yourself even more and more steady, the two go together.

Upasika Kee's image is of two hands washing each other. Have you ever tried putting your one hand under a faucet to wash that hand? You can't get the whole hand done. The other hand has to come in and rub the back of the first hand. When the two hands wash each other like this, they get a lot cleaner than if one tries to just wash itself. So your tranquility washes your insight; your insight washes your tranquility. And when they work together, they can take you to release.