

## *Dhamma in Vinaya*

*July 29, 2021*

The Buddha never named his teachings Buddhism. He called them Dhamma-Vinaya. The Dhamma is what he discovered in the course of finding the deathless—the truths that were conducive to finding the deathless. The Vinaya is what he formulated as rules for the monastic Sangha that he founded. The two go together because the rules are based on principles of Dhamma. Often it's useful to look at how the Buddha worked out some of the implications of how these larger principles should be applied to the rules that govern the life of the Sangha. You can learn a lot of important lessons that way, even if you're not a monk.

Take for instance, the Buddha's analysis of actions for the sake of determining what is and is not an offense. There are five different factors that can come into play: the action, the object, the intention, the perception, and the result.

When the different offenses are analysed, in some of the cases only a few of those factors come into play; in others, all five. For example, take the precept against killing. There has to be the intention to kill the animal. Then you actually have an object, which really is an animal. You perceive it correctly as an animal. You go through the act, and the result of the act is that the animal dies. If all five of those conditions are met, then it's the full offense.

If some of them are not met, then it's a lesser offense or not even an offense at all. For example, if you try to kill an animal but it doesn't die, it's a dukkata offense, which is weaker than the full offense for killing the animal. If you perceive something as not a living being and you drop a heavy weight on it, but it turns out that there was a living being in there, then in that case, there's actually no offense because there was no intention to kill and no perception of "animal."

So as you go through the day as a monk, you have to be very careful about your intentions and how you perceive things. Of course, you have to be careful about your motivations and actions, too, but the emphasis is on your intentions and perceptions.

You can apply the same analysis to your meditation. The reason you'd want to do this is because using this analysis and acting on it develops a lot of the factors for awakening. For instance, as you go through the day, you have to be mindful to keep the rules in mind. That's mindfulness, the first of the factors for awakening. At the same time, you have to be able to analyse your action: What was the intention? What was the perception? That's analysis of qualities, the second factor.

Then there's the effort that goes into this, which is the third factor. If you go through the day successfully, without having committed any offenses, without having harmed anybody, there could be a sense of rapture, and that can then lead to calm. You've got five of the factors for awakening right there. All of them can be conducive to getting the mind into concentration.

Then you can bring the same analysis to your concentration practice. You have the intention to stay with the breath. And you've got the object, which is the breath. Then there's your perception. What perceptions are useful? You can perceive the breath as a whole-body process. You can perceive the breath as originating from outside, you can perceive it as originating inside, or as a cocoon of energy around the solid parts of the body. There are lots of different ways you can perceive it.

There are different levels of breath, just as there are different currents in the ocean. I was reading someplace that there's a current that goes down, down in the cold waters of the Antarctic Ocean, and then travels north very, very slowly up the Atlantic. Hundreds of years and thousands of miles later, it will surface further up north. In a similar way, we have some breath energies in the body that go very slowly. Others go very quickly. There's one level that, as soon as you breathe in, it's already gone throughout the whole body. So you can perceive the breath in different ways, and try to find which perceptions are useful.

Then there's the action, which is the act of focusing. We talk about watching the breath. That's an unfortunate image because it tends to involve the eyes a little bit too much. Think of sensing the breath, wearing the breath. Think of it all around you. See if that helps. What you're trying to do is to become sensitive to the whole body. The image the Buddha gives, describing in the first jhana or stage concentration, is of working water through the ball of soap powder. Another image, for the second jhana, is of a lake that's filled with cool water of a spring that's fed again and again by rain. The image for the third jhana is of lotuses fully immersed in the water, saturated with water from their roots to their tips with the still water. The image for the fourth jhana is of a person covered from head to toe with a white cloth, which stands for awareness filling the body. These are all full-body, full-body, full-body images. So, you want to be sensitive to the full body. That would be the action.

Then of course, there's the result. Ideally, you want to get the mind to settle down. If it doesn't settle down, you go back and look at those other four. What's wrong? Is your motivation not solid? Are the members of the committee in the mind arguing about whether you should stay here or think about something else? If that's the case, look into them. What other agendas do they have right now?

This is where Ajaan MahaBoowa talks about using your discernment to foster concentration. Think about the drawbacks of that kind of thinking, or whatever the other agendas are, until you realize you don't really want to go there. It's not in your best interest. The Buddha describes this with a perception. He says to think of a young man or a young woman fond of ornament, looking in the mirror and discovering a dead snake or a dead dog tied around his or her neck. Imagine that person's sense of disgust. Have the same sense of disgust at unskillful thinking. Here you are trying to get the mind to settle down, and it's an important skill you're trying to develop. If the mind wants to sneak out and catch a few flicks, have a few snacks, ask: for what purpose? That's the intention.

Then you look at the perception: the different ways you perceive the breath. If the mind is unwilling to settle down with one perception, what other perceptions can you try? Is the breath what you want to focus on right now?

That's the third question, which is the object. Maybe the mind needs some contemplation of the parts of the body to settle down. Maybe it needs goodwill to settle down. Maybe it needs a little reflection on how death is going to come, and you're going to need skills at that point.

That's where it's useful to remind yourself of the teaching of the forest ajaans: that in doing meditation, you're practicing how to die well. The big dangers at death are going to be the hindrances. Your craving is going to determine where you're going to go, and if your craving gets diverted by the hindrances, who knows where it'll go? Ill will can take you one place, sensual desire someplace else, restlessness and anxiety someplace other than that—none of which are desirable places.

Some people think that if you're born in line with your craving, that's good. You can go where you want. But your wants are very fickle. They're easily distracted. So if you can't overcome the hindrances right now, how are you going to deal with them when the body is a lot weaker and you're having to deal with pain, having to deal with the fact that you're going to be leaving this body?

Think about that for a while, and then get back to the breath. This is the way we do death contemplation. You don't just sit and think about death all day. You think about it just enough to get yourself motivated to be more on top of the practice. This way you can use this fivefold analysis of motivation or intention, object, perception, action, and result to fine-tune your meditation.

When you do, you can develop the same factors of awakening. In fact, you can develop them deeper. You have to be mindful to do this. You have to be engaged in analysing the qualities of the mind as to what's skillful and what's not. You're putting in the effort. When things finally settle down, there's a sense of refreshment. It starts out with mental refreshment, and then spreads

into the body. Everything calms down. You can get into the concentration—all the factors for awakening. When you get to the higher levels of concentration, they're based on equanimity.

So it's good to borrow some teachings from the Vinaya every now and then, and to apply them to practice, even if you're not a monk. Think of how they apply to your daily life, but also how they apply to your meditation. It's when you see the Buddha's teachings as a whole, both Dhamma and Vinaya, that you really come to understand them.

A while back there was someone who said the Buddha never really taught truths. He had our post-modern idea that truths are relative. But when you look how he uses the concept of truth in the Vinaya, you realize that truth for him is very important. You have to have true perceptions about what's going on. If you're going to make an accusation, you have to be true in citing your source: Was it something you saw, something you heard, or is something you just suspected? You have to be true in giving an account. As for the person being accused of an offense, he has to give an honest account of what he actually did.

So the Buddha didn't have a post-modern attitude toward truth. Truth for him was very important: the truth of your perceptions, the truth of the authority on which you're speaking, the truth of giving an account of what you've done. You need to have this sense of truth in order to meditate.

Again, it's not just a Vinaya issue. It's a meditation issue. When you're engaged in mindfulness, you want to be true in your perceptions. What kind of state is arising in the mind right now so that you know what to do with it? When you're talking, you want to be true about where your ideas come from—both when you're telling other people about them and also when you're talking to yourself. Often you have a lot of ideas that you take as true, but when you stop and think about them, you realize you got them simply because they made sense, or you suspected them, or somebody told you about them. But to what extent do you really know? It's a sobering thought—and it's very useful in helping to pry you loose from ideas that are not useful, and to look with a little bit of scepticism at the content of your thoughts.

Then there's the truth of giving an account. Again, it's your account to yourself. When you meditate, what did you do? What were the results?

So here again, there's an important lesson you can learn from the Vinaya. You apply it to the practice of training the mind.

So, remember, there's Dhamma in Vinaya, which is why it's good to know both.