

# Relinquishing 'Me' & 'Mine'



A Dhamma talk by Ayya Jitindriya

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~ given at Cittaviveka Monastery, UK, February 2002

We're now coming to the end of our winter retreat. Over these past months we have experienced all kinds of conditions passing through the mind – perhaps the whole spectrum, from anger and rage to peace and serenity, from grief and despair to joy and happiness, from desire and longing to contentment and equanimity. This is an aspect of the mind's nature – it can go from one extreme to the other. It goes up and down, goes round and round, turns from black to blue, to white, to red; it can go all over the place. And in my experience, the benefit of being able to have the space and time to practise and contemplate over a longer period such as this, is just to see that much – that this is what the mind does. And when we want to get in there and sort it all out, fix it all up, and make it into what we think it should be, there's a lot of *becoming* energy in that. There's a lot of desire, aversion and delusion involved in that kind of activity.

Being able to see this clearly can lead to relinquishment and letting go. This is the reflection that has come up the most for me in this retreat, and which has been the most consistently useful – this reflection around relinquishment and renunciation. Even needing to relinquish the desire to 'fix it all up,' the very desire that carried me for so long in this practice. I didn't realise that I was holding on to a very deep-seated idea of perfection, an idea of the way it *should* be, or the way 'I' should be (and along with that, the way 'it' or 'I' *shouldn't* be)! There's a lot of judgement, wrong-view and hatred rooted in the mind in 'not-wanting' things, or an inability to open up to the painful or negative experiences.

In contemplating what relinquishment is really about we can come to a place of peace and contentment with the mind just as it is. It's basically about relinquishing the notion of ownership; seeing that these things are not 'mine' in the first place, not 'mine' to fix, not 'mine' to make into something else. When we contemplate and see things in this way then things settle down of their own accord; more clarity arises to actually see the true nature of conditions as they're passing through the mind. When there's a lot of desire to 'fix things up', that very movement of desire, hatred and views just keeps stirring up the water, stirring up the mind.

Much of monastic life is geared towards relinquishment; we practise on many levels of body, speech and mind, giving-up, letting-go, renouncing. But relinquishment has to happen in the mind by relinquishing ownership of the conditions that are passing through. Not in an irresponsible way, but by actually finding a space within that's a little lighter and more spacious around all the conditions we experience. So whatever arises can come, be what it is, and pass through. This is the nature of all conditions – 'whatever arises is of the nature to cease.' It's such a simple truth and yet so hard to see clearly in a mind that is infected with self-view – that is still working on the delusion that 'this is me' and 'this is mine', grasping at whatever arises in consciousness, and creating all sorts of issues and strategies. It all circles around the unquestioned sense of self. Whose stuff is this anyway? We just assume it to be 'me' and 'mine'.

The mind is a weird and wonderful thing and having the space and tools to investigate it can reveal quite a lot. There's a lot of *becoming* energy – which, if it's still based on self-view and ideals, is taking us out of the moment, taking us out of the place where enlightenment is actually possible. The suffering is here and now, the origin of suffering is here and now, the cessation of suffering is here and now, and the path is here and now – they're nowhere else.

But we get caught up in a lot of picking and choosing, what the Buddha calls 'favouring and opposing', based on feelings of pleasure and pain, whether they be subtle or gross feelings. When there's contact at any of the sense doors there's always a feeling-tone associated with that, a feeling-tone of pleasure or pain. It's right at that point that craving arises, that suffering arises. There's a claiming of whatever is passing through to be 'mine', then 'I want' or 'I don't want' arises, and then that proliferates further.

If we're not awake to that process we get caught into the spin, caught into the becoming energy which is taking us away from the possibility of enlightenment here and now. If that process goes unquestioned, we're missing the opportunity to see the natural cessation of phenomena; we're just getting caught up in the craving, clinging and becoming, into the strategizing and proliferating. This happens over and over again. It's the stuff of our practice, the field of our investigation where we can begin to wake up. Contemplating Dependent Origination, the Four Noble Truths, the three characteristics, these are the primary paradigms that can help us to wake up and come back to the Dhamma of relinquishment.

What does it take to relinquish clinging to a feeling, to relinquish the desire for it to be other than the way it is? It takes a lot of

coming into presence; being willing to come into full presence with the way it is. Just that much allows relinquishing to happen. Then, as you contemplate the results of that shift on the body-mind, you see that it brings about more of a sense of ease, contentment, and clarity. For some of us, some fear or uncertainty may arise right there: *'I can't be nothing... I have to be something... I have to hold onto something!'*

In these moments, when there's agitation in the mind, we can see that we're just blindly grasping at anything, anything that's stirred up and running through the mind, grasping at it no matter how painful it is. We're still claiming it to be 'me' and 'mine' because we seek some kind of support. So at those times one needs to be contemplating how suffering is arising, where it is felt, and also where and how it ceases. It's always here and now. It is here where suffering arises, and where suffering ceases.

There's a famous teaching of the Buddha in which he talks of the radiant mind, first describing a mind affected by defilement, and then a mind free of defilement. He says, 'This mind is naturally radiant and pure, it's only defiled by transitory defilements that come from without [itself].' The mind of an enlightened person is no longer stirred up by influences that come from without. I find this a very important teaching because it establishes a slightly different notion of the mind and defilements than the one we

tend to believe. We tend to isolate the mind in a very personal way, connecting it, if not to this body, at least to some sense of a limited self – and thinking that defilements are something that we create. We tend to think that, 'through my ignorance I created them... It's my fault and I'm wrong for having them.' So then, we've got to *do* all this stuff to be free of them!

Yet the mind is said to be naturally radiant, or originally pure, you don't have to fix it. Ajahn Chah says: It's already peaceful by itself, inherently peaceful; it only moves and shakes when it's contacted by sense impressions. Or, as the Buddha described it, the mind shakes when defilements enter into it. And we take those *sankharas* (conditioned formations) that are arising in the mind to be 'self', to be 'me and my problem' or 'me and my stuff'.

Ajahn Mun gave an analogy about this: This pure, radiant mind is like the sun, and the defilements are like the clouds that come over and obscure the sun. It's just clouds floating over obscuring the sun; it's not that the sun isn't there or it's not radiant and pure, or that it's not shining; it's just obscured by passing clouds. He also said: Don't go thinking that the sun goes and grabs at the clouds; rather, it's the clouds that come and obscure the sun. To me this is a really important difference in the way of contemplating the mind and defilements.

The mind gets caught up because we don't actually understand that all conditions arise and pass away and are not-self. If we could understand just that much about everything that arose we'd be free. What arises, ceases, and is not-self. How can it be self if it can be discerned to arise and cease? It's not that the stuff we deal with doesn't have any kind 'reality', but it is a conditioned reality, it comes into being through causes and then passes away. It has no permanent or intrinsic reality.

Another delusion of self-view is when we have a wrong grasp of *kamma* – 'I must have caused this in the past' – taking the teaching on kamma and thinking of experiences as a kind of kammic retribution, so taking it all very personally. That's the nature of self-view, it takes these things very personally. Yes, there are causes and effects, actions and results, but can we see them as just that much without turning them into another cause for self-view and suffering to take root.

Coming back to this word 'relinquishment' – in the teachings (the suttas), it often comes after the experiences of detachment, disenchantment, dispassion and cessation. Experiencing these things is a result of contemplating impermanence, seeing and experiencing the impermanence of conditions with insight – coming to understand conditions as not-self; not me, not belonging to me. There are actually two Pali words relating to



relinquishment: *patinissagga* and *vossagga*. They both appear in the *Anapanasati Sutta* and they're often both translated as relinquishment. *Patinissagga* is a giving up, a renouncing, a letting go, abandonment of craving and clinging. *Vossagga* comes in to replace that word in a similar passage afterwards, at the very end of that sutta, and it is said in one commentary to imply not only a full abandonment and relinquishment but also an 'entering into' Nibbana; a complete letting go of all attachments, and experiencing the peace and freedom of Nibbana. It seems more complete. It is a lovely concept to contemplate because relinquishment is actually about coming into a space of completion and of peace, by letting go of the burden of self-view and resting into Nibbana. Nibbana is described as liberation of mind through not clinging. The mind is liberated by not clinging or holding on to anything. It realises the fullness of its nature; it's a letting go of clinging to those clouds and realising the fullness of its own radiance and purity. It doesn't have to cling; it doesn't have to become anything.

Naturally, when we're not fully awakened we have to work with the habits of the mind. There might be moments of peace, recognition, and relinquishment but we tend to get pulled back into habitual ways and states of mind. The practice is just continually waking up to the way things are, continually remembering the truth of impermanence, seeing that suffering

arises when we claim things to be 'me' and 'mine.' The Buddha said that we tend to delight in feelings. Whether they're pleasant or painful there's an element of delight there. It's actually the mind just habitually wanting to engage, to get a sense of existing or having some purpose, even though it might be painful.

I see in myself a great desire to understand. This desire has a lot of 'becoming' energy in it – *bhavatanha* – because on an intellectual level there's a real hit when we 'get' or 'know' something: 'Ah, now I understand! Now I've got it.' But on an intellectual level it doesn't last long at all. True liberating understanding has to be at the level of direct insight, of clearly seeing the nature of the mind that gets pulled this way and that, and of knowing what it is that pulls it, and relinquishing that. If we use the model of Ajahn Mun's, the mind doesn't go out, rather conditions float through it. The *bhavatanha* is that which, like a hand, grabs at the mental object, and then consciousness becomes established there. That's why it feels so personal – we've just been born into it and created conditions for future birth in the very same place and conditions.

After we have grabbed onto something, what is relinquishment? At that point we have to contemplate the Four Noble Truths – 'This is suffering' – and become aware of the suffering of holding on, of consciousness becoming established in a limited form. Be it

pleasant or painful, it's limited, it's death-bound. Letting go is waking up to that, waking up to the facts of *anicca, dukkha, anatta*. Seeing where it's happening is really important; it seems to be the key. If we don't see the craving that arises upon feeling we can just be stuck in the holding. The metaphor for this is of clinging onto a red-hot iron ball that's burning like hell – we can complain all we like about it, but if we don't see where we're holding on, we won't be able to let go. Once you know where it's happening the instinct operates to just drop it, to let go, because it's hot and it hurts!

Although that sounds very simple, the craving and clinging happening around a painful or pleasant feeling arising upon sense contact is very hard to see. The nature of delusion is that it clouds our vision and our understanding. We get caught in habitual reactions and responses. We get caught in views that block us from seeing what's happening. Remembering images such as the radiant mind or the passing clouds is helpful. Also, we can remember Ajahn Chah's image of the mind being inherently peaceful, that it only shakes when touched by sense impressions, just as leaves shake when they're blown by the wind. It's the wind that blows the leaves; it's not in the nature of the leaves. So, if we have no argument with sense contact, with the mind experiencing things, then there'll be the clarity to understand the nature of all this.

Another familiar metaphor of Ajahn Chah's is that of the still forest pool, which is a metaphor for the still mind where there's a degree of *samadhi*. Sitting by a still forest pool we can see many different creatures coming to drink there, all sorts of weird and wonderful creatures; this is likened to the stillness of the mind which can clearly see all the different conditions that come. You don't have to get out there and chase away the ones you don't like, or order them all according to the way you want them to be; just see their nature and leave them be. There are all sorts of different creatures, they come and go, they have their own relationships with each other; so just come to know that and be aware of that.

If we're harassed by particular neurotic tendencies that have obsessed us for a long time, then we can get to know them as we would a particular kind of creature that we're really interested in. We're out there hiding behind a tree, really wanting to understand this peculiar, strange creature we're watching. We watch it carefully, so we don't do anything that's going to scare it away; we just watch its nature, watch its behaviour and get to know it. It can take a lot to open up to stuff within ourselves, to have that kind of attitude towards certain things that we've had a lot of fear or judgement about. Can we check out our attitude towards those things when they arise and consider: 'Well, how can I understand this? How does it arise? How does it pass away?'

We might also find that there are other things we need to meet before we can look at that, like the fear or guilt about it. They are also creatures of their own. 'How does that come into being? How is it maintained? How am I relating to it?' We can just get very frightened of fear. It is very hard to be still with fear and look at it, but we have to cultivate the attitude that allows it to come out so we can see it for what it is. We learn to trust in the stability of awareness.

One of the main aspects of this life devoted to Dhamma, is to practise virtue, to cultivate this mind in a good way. So, it's okay to look at this more ugly, difficult stuff that arises and trust in your good intentions to see clearly in order to let go and be free of it. Trusting is another essential aspect of the practice. Just remember to trust in your capacity of awareness, which is really the root refuge in Buddha - the one who is awake. Trust in your own capacity to be aware: awareness can always embrace whatever's going on.

Before I finish, another one of Ajahn Chah's pearls of wisdom comes to mind. He said, 'When the mind is peaceful, it is just like still flowing water.' It's a bit of a conundrum. He put it this way: "Have you ever seen still water? Have you ever seen flowing water? When the mind is peaceful, it is just like still flowing water."

To me, conditions are what flow through the mind. But the mind doesn't have to be moved by that flow, it can embrace or let it be while not being pulled in. The stillness of peace and clarity maintains its own integrity. This is detachment, *viveka*, a quality of being 'in the world' yet not 'of the world', not drawn into worldliness. In that level of detachment there is peace and yet there is flow. Relinquishment is not cutting off from the world's conditions but realising their true nature and the true nature of the radiant mind. The metaphor for this is that of the bead of water that just rolls off the lotus leaf, it doesn't get absorbed into the leaf. It's like the world and the enlightened mind, they can be together but the enlightened mind, or that peace and stillness, is not affected or distorted by the flow of the world. There's a full knowing, a full capacity for understanding, but not a joining to it. Not being swept along, not joining to the realm of birth and death anymore; that's the quality of the awakened mind, of 'still flowing water'.

So, relinquishment isn't about getting rid of anything – of getting rid of one's old self and getting a better self, or of getting rid of the nasty things. It's about relinquishing the tenacious habit of clinging to any thing, whether good or bad; relinquishing the 'I'-making, 'mine'-making, 'me'-making mechanism through seeing it as it truly is.