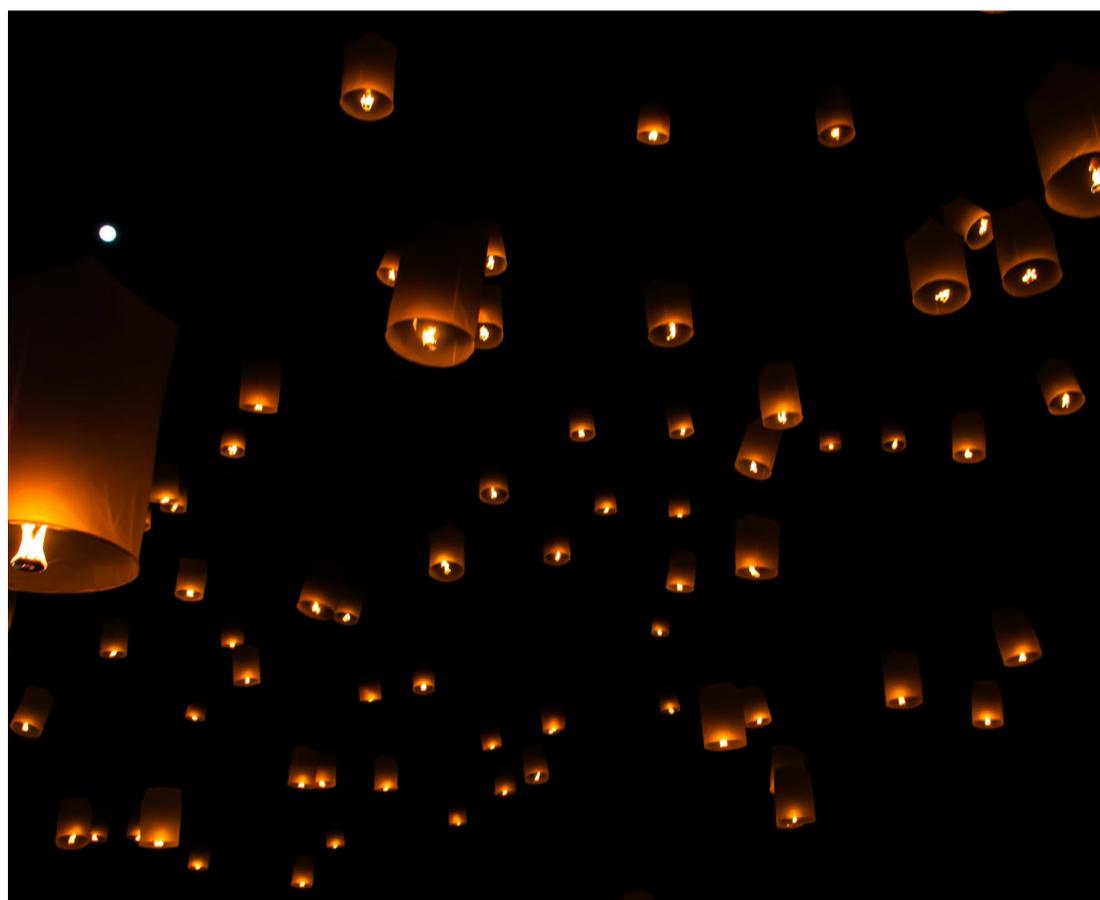


Questions & Answers

ALBA Day of Practice 16 January 2021

'Bringing light to the world'



Randula Haththotuwa

Finding inner peace

Could you give some of your thoughts on inner happiness through contemplating certain meditation objects which are particularly helpful?

Sense of inner happiness – arises on its own accord as we practice the Path of letting go. Contemplating anything according to Dhamma would lead to this inner clarity. Whatever is your direct experience now – apply the Dhamma to that – every time we do this, we are closer to realising and understating the true nature of this existence and true nature of our hearts - this leads to an inner peace and contentment. The key is not to shy away from looking at things that we do not like or are not interested in. So not to pick and choose. Everything we experience if it is seen under the lamp of mindfulness, of observing with complete acceptance – then we can see the Truth for ourselves.



Gladdening the heart

....And also how to gladden the heart through worldly experiences?

We spoke about this at length on the day. In fact, took up the whole of the Q&A session! Briefly, I have written down some of what many of us shared on the day and a few thoughts that arose since.

We mentioned reflecting on what we can be grateful for, from the smallest things in nature, to people around us, anything in our circumstances, our teachers, having access to the teachings – gratitude brings about joy to the heart (*Katannu*).

Reflecting on where we may have been generous throughout the day, let it be just making a cup of tea or moving and waiting for someone to pass by without rushing ourselves (*Dana*).

Generating feelings and acting with kindness and compassion towards other beings let it be a small ant or those you live with or a person on the street (*Metta, Karuna*).

Reflecting, being joyful and encouraging of others generosity and kind actions (*Anumodana*).

Feelings of gladness reflecting on another's success, rejoicing in the fruits of their good actions (*Mudita*).

Reflecting on our efforts in practicing the Path itself and gladdening the heart reflecting on the day, of how we have kept the precepts, done our sitting and walking practice, been mindful and considerate, listened to Dhamma talks, engaged in Dhamma discussion – and we can bring joy to our hearts knowing we are on the Right Path.

Also just moving the muscles around our mouths so that it forms a smile can gladden our hearts just by doing that.

Not taking ourselves too seriously, trying to find that inner child within us that can approach life - 'the petri-dish' for our practice -with playful curiosity and joy - this can soften and gladden the heart.

We can then use this joy skilfully, it can energise us when we are feeling tired, and lethargic - we can spread this joy to others - ultimately we use this joyful state to calm the mind to observe and understand our experience.



Being in Dhamma in the face of illness

If one gets Covid and hospitalised how can Dhamma help to distract from the illness. Is mindfulness possible

We touched upon this also on the day – and we realised that the Dhamma is not to distract ourselves from the reality of the situation – it is to help us be with it and understand it. If illness is the reality – then how can we use Dhamma to understand this. We can prepare ourselves before we fall ill, contemplating that this body is of the nature to fall ill. It is made up of the four elements (earth, water, air and heat) – we keep doing this – until we experience the four elements for ourselves – so where ever we look at the body – that is all we can see – the four elements – not an ear, nose, toe or chest – but just the four elements – there is no separation – we then reflect and see other people and things in nature just next to us, a plant, a table – and we then begin to see for ourselves that they too are also just made of these four elements – we are all the same – part of nature. We see how when we were young it was just these four elements, when we grow old, and we are dying – its just all nature – nothing that belongs to me. We slowly reduce our attachment to this body and can let it flow and change according to its own nature.

We can contemplate the different organs in the body – you may find it helpful to look at an anatomy atlas to visualise this – and realise this body as we see it from the outside is not the entire story – can we accept it for what it truly is – letting go of our aversions of it and letting go of our attachments to how we want it to be.

With regards to illness, we can reflect on illness on how beings fall ill and how there is no difference in our bodies - then how can I be any special and not be subject to falling ill? The body when it does fall ill, we can look at our resistance to falling ill. We are holding on to a state of 'good health' and we don't want it to change but that is out of delusion, not clear seeing. Not realising this body is not mine. It is part of nature. The law of this universe, is for it to age, fall ill and die. If we can't accept this then we will suffer. We are in the wrong universe! What we want doesn't exist in this universe – a state of not falling ill and not dying. In this existence here, there is birth and death. We have to accept this – the beauty then is when we do this when we are able to completely wholeheartedly accept this existence for what it is – we can then go beyond this existence – where there is no further birth, ageing illness and death.



Where is my heart?

I don't 'see' the 'peace' in my heart but rather round my head/forehead and the whole of the body and around the body, which is peaceful and pleasant. How could this be? Any thoughts on that? 🌸

The heart or citta, one may say is the organ of awareness or consciousness – where we can know for ourselves – the Truth of the moment. Ajahn Sumedho would often refer to this as our intuitive awareness. It is amazing how we spend most of our lives not really paying much attention to this so we can't really feel it or see it. It took me by surprise as well. I remember the thought arising *'its as if the heart had its own voice!'* – I was used to hearing thoughts. The heart operates at the level of feelings. When there is a sense of self behind this with preference to a certain way of how things should be – we can notice in the heart region, this sense of contraction – whereas when this sense of self is let go of, there is an expansive, limitless feeling. To the extent where the heart just feels empty.

It is within awareness and consciousness, that the mind and body arise. The heart that has let go of clinging and aversion can be at peace whether the mind and body feels pleasant and peaceful and also when the mind and body feels unpleasant, restless and painful.

The states of mind and body are not stable – they depend on conditions but the heart can be trained to not depend on the mind and body – we can move away from identifying with the mind and body as being me or mine as reliable sources of happiness then we can have a mind that is in pain and crying or a body that is in pain, yet the heart can let it all happen without any resistance - fully expressing it and accepting it for how it is.

So there is a stillness - yet things flow at the same time – as the title goes in Ajahn Chah's biography – *'Stillness flowing'*.



How can we be mindful all day

I was wondering if you could elaborate on moment-to-moment awareness in daily life. It seems that some effort is required, but I'm not sure how to find sustainable effort. Pushing too much is unsustainable. If I don't apply enough effort, the mind gets lost and there is no clear awareness. Either way, it doesn't last all day. How is clear awareness sustained in daily life?



One that I would often say - first, enjoy the practice - when we enjoy the practice, we keep doing the practice, as we keep doing the practice, we then start living the practice, and as we start living the practice – we ultimately become the practice – where we then can't separate ourselves from the practice – we become nothing but a medium through which the practice manifests.

Also reflecting on our day's practice at the end or beginning of the following day - and gladdening our heart for when we were mindful and then reminding ourselves of times we were not so – serves both as a daily reminder as well as an encouragement.

We can then make a determination – (which is one of the Paramis called *Adhitthāna* in Pali) – we can say to ourselves, *'I make the determination for this day - to follow the eight fold Path – and not be swayed by the ways of the world'* – this then serves almost as an undercurrent for the rest of the day – the mind has been given this instruction – that this is what we will follow for today - we can then let go of that thought – but as we do this every morning – it becomes the natural direction for the mind. It begins to incline more and more towards being in the Path.

We can also give energy to our practice by reflecting on the goodness of our practice on a daily basis and then saying to ourselves may this goodness from our practice itself, continue to guide us in this Path.

Then during the day, we just need to keep reminding ourselves with right balance of kindness and strictness like you would do with a child. We have to keep putting this effort until it becomes the habit of the mind. Enjoying the practice, bringing joy to the practice, is a good way of getting the mind to keep doing it as well.

Where is the mind, body and awareness?

I am interested in the relationship between mind, body and awareness. Is the mind in the body which is in awareness? Does the mind need the body and vice versa to come into existence for awareness to be present here and now to be conceived and perceived by the mind and experienced in the body? Or am I looking for relationships where there are none?

This practice is for us to see this for ourselves. The true nature of our experience – of mind, body and awareness. Where do we notice the mind – in the present moment. Where do we notice the body – in the present moment. Where do we notice awareness – in the present moment. Where is the mind and body – we notice it as there is awareness of it – so the mind and body arises in this awareness. Where is the mind in relation to the body? Where is the body in relation to the mind? Wherever you feel the body is, is where the body is. Wherever you feel the mind is, is where the mind is. That is always in the present moment.



Can I feel what is right?

We know what is right from our Heart, but is our spiritual Heart in any way at all related to our physical heart? E.g. can we also feel what is right?

Yes, that is what it is – it is a feeling that we must eventually train ourselves to be able to trust. Ajahn Sumedho would refer to it as intuitive awareness. It is ultimately the heart that is free from greed, hatred and this sense of self (delusion) that knows things for how they are. When we let go of wanting things to be otherwise, when we surrender to the way things are – the heart is freed from greed, aversion and delusion – and it knows the Truth of the situation – it is felt – so we then go beyond relying on the precepts to tell us what is right and wrong – and we can then rely on our heart to know.

You can see it for yourself – try just being with things – and see what it feels like in the heart – you can do this when speaking with people – just wait and see if you can feel it in your heart – when the heart is at peace without aversion or clinging – then it has clarity – and we can trust that heart – it will then know – you will then feel *'ah it feels like the right time to speak'*. In this tradition of the Thai forest Sangha we are encouraged not to prepare Dhamma talks, so we sit and see what comes up in the heart – so we trust the heart that is still and peaceful, just present with how things are - as this heart knows what is needed for the moment. If we had prepared what to say from before – it would be from memory or our analysis of what might be useful but for one to truly know what is needed for that moment, you can only know by truly being present in that moment and speaking from a heart that is completely accepting of that moment with no aversion or clinging.



How can we connect when we our hurt?

Can our spiritual Heart suffer in any way? E.g. if we see others wilfully being violent or angry (towards us)? Can our Heart be connected to others?

It is our heart that feels suffering. When the heart has clinging or aversion to what ever it is experiencing whether it be pleasant or unpleasant there will be suffering. Yes, it is through our hearts that we connect to others and to truly connect with others we have to accept them and our experience with them for how it is – even if it is unpleasant and we do not like it. When we accept it for how it is, we then truly connect with every experience and everybody. They may still not like us and may not see how we see things but we can be at peace in our own hearts with no resentment - and we won't be adding further fuel to the fire. As the Buddha says, by holding on to anger in our own hearts, we are only burning ourselves.



Light at the end of the tunnel

Why do our politicians keep telling us there is "light at the end of the tunnel"? When the tunnel keeps extending and there is light in our own Hearts.

Because that is the common perception – of being hopeful of better days to come – always waiting for the weekend or the holiday to relax and enjoy.



How can we be open to painful experiences

What tips would Ajahn Chah have given us to make sure we are open to reflection on painful experiences rather than denying them?

The longer you leave it the more unwieldy it will get. You see one wild plant and think 'ah that wont cause too much of a problem and you leave it be' or you see a small flame from a match stick on the floor and think 'ah just a small match stick, wont be a problem' but before you know it your whole garden is over run with weeds and the flames have burnt the house down.

Every time we don't look at things we don't like we are just burning ourselves – we are still holding on to it – like holding on to a hot iron rod

So the longer we take to realise this – the longer we will suffer and the more work we will have to do when we do wake up to it.



Feeling of connectedness - what if I held on to it?

The word connection came up during me as I started the walking meditation and I felt a strong sense of connection with the ground my ancestors and my children and grandchildren, connecting me to all that's gone before all that is and all that is yet to come. Is wanting to hold on to that feeling of connectedness yet another grasping. It felt v spacious.

Yes, as soon as we hold on to something – it is grasping. That feeling you describe, is it there now? Just notice all these feelings whether wholesome or unwholesome, pleasant or unpleasant as not sure – they are all uncertain – if we hold on to them as certain as a sure thing – we will suffer – as their nature is to change – we are trying to hold on to something that is ever changing – knowing that their nature is to change we can let it be. Otherwise, it is like grasping at air – all we will be doing is making a fist and digging our nails into our palms – there is nothing to hold on to, all we are doing is creating suffering.

