

Katina Ceremony October 18th, 2007
Chicago, IL Thai Buddhist Temple
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How to Achieve the Cessation of Suffering.

It's an interesting thing when we start looking at the Buddha's teaching. When a lot of people from all over the world start talking about what the Buddha taught, they say that the Buddha taught Suffering. But actually the suffering was already there. He didn't have to teach anybody about how much pain there is in life. He taught: "The Cessation of Suffering". That's a major difference and, it's real important to understand that.

All of the Buddha's teaching is about how to have an uplifted mind, a content mind and a mind that is free from suffering.

About Buddhist Meditation:

When we start practicing meditation, and I'm going to talk to you about meditation, because I am a meditation teacher; when we talk about meditation, a lot of people have the idea that meditation is just about sitting, like the Buddha image behind me without moving.

Meditation is all of life. It's about being aware in your mind about being in the present moment. As one becomes more aware of mind's attention moving from one thing to another one starts to recognize more easily how you actually cause your own pain. You have an idea that I want something to be in a particular way. When that doesn't happen, what does your mind do with that?

One of the things that happens to people who do meditation is that they don't like to have any hindrances to arise. But life has all kinds of hindrances in it. You have the greedy mind, I want it. You have the mind, I don't want it. You have a mind that gets dull and bored. You have a mind that gets agitated. And you have a mind that has doubt in it. This can happen to anyone at any time. You don't have to be sitting in meditation to have it happen. **What you do with that hindrance dictates whether you suffer or not.**

Have you ever had one of those days where you had 25 things to do? And you only have 10 minutes to do it? And you run around from here to there and "Oh, I'm in such a hurry. I have to get this done!" That's a mind that has restlessness in it, isn't it? That's a mind that has aversion to what is happening in the present moment. That's a mind that suffers. So, what do you do with that?

The best thing to do, and, the easiest way to let go of all hindrances, is to laugh and to smile at how crazy your mind is! Now this sounds really odd. When you laugh at your mind for being so flighty and caught up; when you laugh, all of a sudden, your mind goes from "I'm in a hurry, I have to do this now, I really feel a lot of anxiety, or the new word for this century is STRESS; I have so much stress!" When you laugh about being so involved with that and taking things so personally, and identifying with all of those thoughts and feelings; when you laugh, it changes your perspective! It changes your view of the world! It goes from "I am that and I don't like it" to "Oh it's only this! What's that? It's easy to let go of!"

The Buddhist path is about having an uplifted mind, not having a serious mind, not having a mind that gets upset very easily. It's

about recognizing all of these things and having balance in your mind.

The more balance you practice the less personally you take whatever arises.

Earlier today, when I was giving you the instructions in the meditation, I was saying that you need to smile. I have to admit that after we were sitting for a minute or two I started looking around to see if anybody was smiling and nobody was! We have a tendency to get over serious. When you are over serious, you try too hard. When you try too hard you make restlessness arise. Now there is more suffering. It takes a balanced effort. But it takes a LIGHT effort.

The more you can smile, the more you can laugh with whatever is in the present moment, the lighter your mind becomes; the more aware your mind becomes.

I have a Yahoo Group that I give instructions to all the time. And we have a lot of people coming there and they tell me how difficult the practice is. My advice always is: "I don't want you to sit in meditation. I want you to take one week, seven days, that's all, and I want you to smile, all the time. And when you can't smile, I want you to laugh."

What does this do? It makes your mind light and it changes your perspective. Any time you see your mind getting serious, that's the time to laugh and smile. Every time you have repeat thoughts over

and over again, that's the time to realize there is an attachment there, and, smile and laugh into that.

You know, all of the Buddha images, they have that little smile on their lips. Why? The artist is trying to show that there is joy in his life. The Buddha was experiencing joy. Joy is one of the enlightenment factors. As a matter of fact, it's the middle enlightenment factor. There are seven enlightenment factors, and Joy is right in the middle. That is the balancing point. Why?

When you have an uplifted mind, your mindfulness is strong. It's easy to see what you are doing. It's easy to adjust your energy. If you do that, and you have that joy, then your mind becomes tranquil. Your mind becomes very collected and your mind becomes balanced. That's the seven factors of enlightenment. It's real important to practice smiling.

[NOTE: The seven factors ARE Mindfulness, Investigation, Energy, JOY, Tranquility, Collectedness (meaning proper level of concentration) and Equanimity]

I told somebody about this awhile back and they were telling me how difficult it was. It's hard to smile.

It's not hard to smile. It's hard NOT TO SMILE. The more you smile into what you are doing, the more alert your mind becomes.

The more awake your mind becomes, the easier it is to watch mind's attention moving from one thing to another. It's easier to see how your mind becomes attached and causes more suffering.

Too many times people like to blame external circumstances for their problems. "You cause me to be sad! It's all your fault!" Have you ever heard expressions like that? Well, actually nobody out there can cause your suffering. You cause your suffering to yourself by taking whatever arises personally and not liking it and wanting it to be different than what it is.

A part of the instructions in the meditation that I didn't go into this morning, is that when you sit in meditation, there can be some sensations that can arise. You can get an itch. You have heat. You have vibration. You feel like a cough coming on and there can be pain when you sit very still. What you do with what happens in the present moment, dictates what happens in the future. This is Karma.

"What you do with what arises in the present moment dictates what happens in the future."

If you fight with the present moment, if you resist the present moment, if you try to change the present moment the way you want it to be, you're fighting with the Dhamma. You're fighting with the truth, with the truth of the present moment. So what do you do when a sensation arises? Almost everybody starts moving around. There's scratching here, scratching there, almost anything to make that sensation go away. But the instructions in the meditation say: don't move! Now what do you do?

You watch HOW your mind works. You are learning to see how mind moves. You notice first that you have a lot of thoughts about that sensation. "I wish it would stop. I wish it would go away! Why does it have to bother me now?" You have all of these kinds of thoughts. Every time you indulge in that kind of thinking, it makes that sensation bigger and more intense, until finally, you can't stand it and you have to do something to change it.

Every thought about a sensation makes the sensation bigger and more intense! So, what do we do now? You let that thought go. You don't continue thinking it. You just let it be there by itself, but you don't keep your attention on it. Every time your mind's attention moves, there's tension and tightness in your head, in your mind, and that tension and tightness is the cause of suffering. What is the cause of suffering? CRAVING.

Craving always manifests as tension and tightness in your mind and in your body.

If you let the thought go, you let go of the tension and tightness. Now you see that you have a great big mental fist wrapped around that feeling. That mental fist IS aversion. "I don't like it. I don't want it to be there."

But the truth is: "it's there". That is the Dhamma. What you do with the truth in the present moment dictates what happens in the future. If you allow the space for that sensation to be there without any resistance, you'll see that tight mental fist just kind of open up and become calm. If you watch more closely, you will see that there's tension and tightness in your head, in your mind, and so you relax this leftover tension. When you relax, it's like a flower opening up.

You see your mind kind of expand and then it becomes very calm. At this point you'll notice right after you let go of that tension and tightness, there are no thoughts. There's just this mind that is pure, alert, and very aware and you bring that mind back to your object of meditation.

Now, the thing with these kind of hindrances when they arise is that they don't go right away. So you get to do it again and again until they do. But when a hindrance arises a hindrance is showing you where your real attachment is. The attachment is always "I am." "I am that!" It's showing you where your craving is. When you let go of that tension and tightness, you have a brief moment of the cessation of suffering. You don't have Clinging arise, because you've let go of the cause of the clinging arising. You've let go of the Craving. You bring that pure mind back to your object of meditation.

Let's get back to our smiling. What does this actually do? When you start to smile into things, all the time, when you have a mind that's uplifted, its alert, you can see more and more clearly, when tightness starts to pull your mind down, when it starts to cause suffering and it's much easier to let go. When you smile, when you laugh into whatever your mind gets caught by, you're developing your Mindfulness in a real way.

How many people here can tell me what the word Mindfulness means? I ran across a monk the other day, and he was telling me that you have to be mindful and I said what does that mean? He said: "It means you have to be mindful." I said, "It's important to know: What is the definition of Mindful?" He said: "The definition of mindfulness is "being mindful!" But you can't use the word you are trying to define in the definition! We talked about this and I told him what do you think of this?

Mindfulness is: remembering to observe HOW mind's attention moves from one thing to another. Mindfulness is your observation of what's happening in the present moment.

With that kind of a definition you start to understand more clearly that when you practice smiling you're developing your awareness in the present moment and that the mindfulness is the observation power.

Using Right Effort in Meditation:

When the Buddha talked about the 8 Fold-Path, in one sutta, in particular, he talked about three of the factors of the 8-Fold Path that were very, very important. The first was mindfulness. The second was Effort. What is right effort? In the 8-Fold Path Right Effort is, well, I use generally different words when I talk about the 8-Fold Path and instead of "Right" I talk about "Harmonious".

Being in harmony with your effort has four steps to follow:

First, you practice recognizing when your mind is on something unwholesome;

Second, you let go of that unwholesome;

Third you relax and bring up a smile! That smile is a new wholesome object in your mind and then;

Fourth, you keep that wholesome object going!

These are the four steps of Right Effort or Harmonious Practice.

Every time you smile, you are letting go of an unwholesome object and you are developing a wholesome object. You're letting go of a mind that's heavy and you are developing a mind that is light and this helps your mindfulness immeasurably.

The more you smile, the more you can laugh with your daily activities, the more alert your mind becomes.

There's something that you did this morning that's a very good thing to do, you took the five precepts. It's important to realize that it's not a rite and ritual to just recite the formula when you take the precepts. Why do you need to keep your precepts? The closer you keep your precepts the more calm your mind becomes, the less you have anxiety and stress arise and, the less the hindrances bother you. You will have better awareness for meditation.

When I was in Malaysia, I was teaching meditation and this woman came up, she'd been at the center for a long time. She helped everybody a lot. She was very, very strong at keeping her precepts. She would never tell a little white lie. She would never say anything that was wrong. She would never harm anyone. She asked me if she could meditate. She wanted to learn. She'd never learned it before. So, I told her to come next weekend I'm gonna give a retreat. I gave her the instructions. She sat down and she started meditating.

A few hours later I came by and said: "Well, how's your meditation going?"

She said: "Well, I can only sit for 45 minutes!"

Now, 'only sit for 45 minutes', well, a light bulb came up in my head! "Well why don't you sit for longer?" I said.

"You know, I'm not used to sitting on the floor and it causes a lot of pain to come up and I can only stand it for 45 minutes."

I said, "there's no magic in sitting on the floor. If you wanna sit in a chair, sit in a chair. Just don't lean into the chair. Sit so your back is straight."

Her next sitting was 4 hours! Her next sitting she went from never experiencing a deep state of meditation to experiencing a very deep state of meditation. Now why was she able to do this? Because she kept her precepts very, very well. That leads to a mind that doesn't have any anxiety in it. It leads to a mind that doesn't have any remorse in it. No guilty feeling. If you say something that you know is wrong, even if it's to not hurt someone else's feeling, even if you tell a little white lie, your quiet voice, in your mind comes out and says: "I shouldn't have said that!". That affects the way you see the world.

The more you can follow the five precepts, in every aspect of your life, the easier life becomes, the easier it is to learn meditation, and when you learn meditation, you have more and more opportunities to have this uplifted mind.

Life becomes very much fun! It becomes really interesting and there's real freedom in that. That's the cessation of suffering.

The more you can practice smiling and laughing with your own mind, the more you can have joy arise in your life, the easier it is to recognize when your mind becomes very upset. It's easy to recognize when your mind becomes heavy and it's also easy to let that go because you recognize that you are causing your own pain.

Suppose I come up yelling at you and you say I am causing you suffering. NO! I'm just yelling. You're causing the suffering to yourself by not liking it and then resisting it and getting caught in all kinds of thoughts about it.

Seeing Clearly the 8-Fold Path

You know when the Buddha gave the first discourse, he talked about the 8 Fold Path very, very deeply and, he said that this is the middle way. The 8-Fold Path, usually has a lot of Right this and right that. I don't really like that very much. Because if something is right, then, something is wrong! Then everything is either Black or White. Actually, very little in our life is either black or white. Instead of Right View or Right Understanding, I call it Harmonious Perspective.

What is a (1) Harmonious Perspective? Harmonious Perspective is seeing that everything that arises is part of an impersonal process. Now for example: Somebody comes up to you and they have a lot of anger and they throw their anger at you. What is your natural inclination? To take their anger, and, make it your anger and then

throw it back at them! Now you're at war. Now you're fighting. Now, you're causing yourself a lot of suffering.

When they walk away, now when you're fighting, this is another thing that happens. I'm talking. You're talking. We don't hear what each other says. We only know what we said.

And how right we are! And how wrong they are!

So when they walk away, what do you think about?

What they said. What I said. What I should have said.

And I'm right and they're wrong! And then a little while later, just like it was on a tape deck, what happens again? Same thing.

What they said. What I said. What I should have said.

Now this is a mind that has attachment in it.

Attachment to what?

It's an attachment to these thoughts and feelings as being mine personally. Every time you think that the thoughts and feelings that arise are yours, your mind has delusion in it.

Your mind is confused. So, you are causing yourself pain.

Now here's something real interesting. One of the major illnesses in this country right now is Depression. I can tell you exactly how depression arises. I can tell you exactly how to get rid of it without taking any drugs. But you gotta do it. When depression arises, what actually happens in your mind? You have a feeling arise and it's a painful feeling and then your mind grabs onto that and says, "I don't like that!" Now, the "I like it mind" and the "I don't like it mind" is "CRAVING."

Right after there is this tension that comes up. Then there are all of the thoughts and all of the opinions, all of the ideas, all of the concepts about why this feeling came up. Then your old habitual tendency, your habitual way of looking at the world, gets more and more involved with that. What are you actually trying to do when a painful feeling arises?

Well, we have five aggregates that make up our body mind process. You have **physical Body/Rupa**. You have **feeling/Vedana** Feeling is pleasant, painful or neither painful nor pleasant. We have **Perception/Sanna**. Perception is the mind that names things. You see this? It's a flower. Perception is the part of mind that put that name on that and it has memory involved with it. You have **Thoughts/Sankhara** and you have **Consciousness/Vinnana**. These are the **five aggregates**.

When a painful feeling arises, our habitual tendency is to try to Think the Feeling away. But, the more you try to think the feeling, the bigger and more intense that feeling becomes. You get more and more depressed because you are trying to control a feeling with your thoughts. But thoughts are one thing, and, feeling is something else. Never the two shall meet. So what do you do?

When I was telling you about what you do when a painful sensation arises while you are meditating. I tell you first to let go of the thoughts. Don't be involved with the content of the thoughts. Let the thought be, without getting involved in it, and relax the tightness caused by that distraction. Next, you see the feeling for what it really is. It's a painful feeling, it's true. But it's ok for a painful feeling to be there. It has to be, because that's the truth. When a painful feeling arises, it is there!

Allow the space for that painful feeling to be there and relax. Then you come over to your smile and wishing happiness for someone. The more you do that, the less your mind becomes distracted until finally there is no more depression! This isn't a maybe. This is how it works. It takes practice; practice with smiling; Practice with laughing and every time you laugh at how crazy your mind is, you're not crazy anymore!

That is changing your perspective from a tight observation of "I am that", to an observation of "it's only that"! See if you have that tight observation your mind tightens around it and you wind up getting a headache. Someone asked me when was the last time I had a headache? I said "well, I don't really remember, maybe about three or four years ago, I don't remember. I don't get headaches". Why not? Because I see the tightness starting and I relax it right then! Then I don't have any headache. Do I need to take aspirin? No. Why would I need to do that?

Practicing smiling and laughing into things changes your perspective of the world around you.

If I come to you with this flower, let's say it's a rose. And I give it to you and you're in a happy mood. What do you see? Ah! The flower is very beautiful and it smells great and the color is wonderful. Now, if I take that flower away and I come back and give it to you when you are in an unhappy mood, what do you see? You see the thorns, how it hurts you and how you don't like it. What's different? The flower is still the same thing. It's a flower. It's your perspective that is different.

The Buddha spent 45 years trying to show people how to have an uplifted mind, how to have a content mind; how to have a mind that was free from suffering. The more you smile, the more you laugh into things, the easier it is to change your perspective. When you change your perspective, what you are doing is changing how you hold an image in your mind of being unhappy to an image of being happy.

→The second part of the 8 Fold Path is called **(2)Harmonious Imaging** which concerns the image you hold in your mind.

What kind of an image do you hold, in your mind? Are you in harmony with that image?

→ The next part of the 8 Fold Path is a real interesting thing because a lot of monks will tell you that when you are practicing meditation, you don't have to practice the next three factors of the 8 Fold Path. They call it Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. Again I am not real wild about those translations. So I call it **(3) Harmonious Communication.**

When the Buddha practiced, or when he first started talking about the 8-Fold Path to the five ascetics, he was talking to people who, for years, had been working very hard on developing their mind. When he was talking about Right Speech, he wasn't saying that they were going around cursing people or using wrong speech. He was talking about a kind of communication that you have with yourself. How many people are hard on themselves? How many people are critical of the way they do things? How many people cause themselves suffering because of their own thoughts, opinions and ideas?

(3) Harmonious Communication means that you have to love yourself. You're with yourself more than you are with anybody else. When you smile or you laugh, you are learning how to change your communication with your self so you have an uplifted mind and that leads to freedom. That leads to true happiness.

→ The next part of the 8-Fold Path they call it Right Action. I changed that to **(4) Harmonious Movement** which means watching the movement of mind's attention; not jerking your mind around, not causing undue tensions to arise in your mind and your body, but, being in harmony with that.

→ Now the next part of the 8-Fold Path has always been rather comical to me because it has always been explained to me as right livelihood and right livelihood means don't kill any being, don't use any poisons, and don't take any slaves and sell them. Now how ridiculous is that to say this at the first discourse to the ascetics that have been practicing not killing for a long time? So what is it? What is Right livelihood? I call it **(5) Harmonious Lifestyle** which means being in harmony with yourself and with everyone around you all of the time. Living in a way that causes you and other people around you to have an uplifted mind.

→ The next part is, they call it Right Effort, I call it **(6) Harmonious Practice** and I already told you about that. That's the four-fold formula. Recognizing something unwholesome; letting go of that; relaxing- smiling; and continuing smiling. Have an uplifted mind. Don't let mind get caught up condemning and criticizing. That's unwholesome. Develop that mind that is uplifted. It takes a lot of energy to do that. It's not easy, but it's definitely worthwhile, and the easiest way to do that? Smile, and, laugh! It's hard to do that isn't it? Takes a lot of effort to smile and laugh. It takes the effort to remember to do that.

When you're caught up in an emotional state, you're really identifying heavily with the dissatisfaction, the dislike of the present moment. You're causing yourself huge amounts of suffering, but, as you remember to let go of the unwholesome and relax and smile, developing that mind that is uplifted changes your view of the world. It makes that flower that I was talking about awhile ago always be beautiful. You stop causing yourself pain and suffering. You continually bring your mind up the more you practice smiling and laughing and the easier it is to have joy arise. And you need to have joy because that is one of the enlightenment factors.

→ The next part of the 8-Fold Path is Right Mindfulness or **(7) Harmonious Observation**. This mindfulness is just non-judgmentally observing. It's only function is to remember to observe what is happening in the present moment with mind and body. It's the observation mind. It doesn't change anything. It just observes how mind is acting in the present moment. The Right Effort/Harmonious Practice is what changes things.

→ The last of the 8 Fold Path has always been called Right Concentration and I really have trouble with this word in this country because concentration implies that your mind stays on only one thing to the exclusion of everything else. But that's not what the Buddha taught. He taught a meditation practice using a mind that was unified and collected. **This is (8) Harmonious Collectedness**. This points to a particular quality and degree of concentration for successful meditation.

During the time of the Buddha, the Pali word Samadhi was made up by the Buddha. There were a lot of words meaning one-pointed concentration. There were a lot of words for having a mind that doesn't move. But he chose not to use them. He made

up this word to describe **how mind can be very calm and very alert of whatever else is happening around it.**

Using the 6Rs for all the time meditation:

I've just given you the 8-Fold Path with a little different twist to it than maybe what you are used to seeing. This turns out to be very practical. When we use the 8-Fold Path in this practical way, there's a system of doing the meditation. It's called a mnemonic system; a system that helps you to remember how to do the meditation all the time. It goes like this.

You RECOGNIZE when your mind gets distracted;

You RELEASE the distraction;

then you RELAX (any leftover subtle tension that is still there);

You RE-SMILE;

You RETURN to your object of meditation and;

You REPEAT staying with your object of meditation and doing the cycle again.

We call this the 6Rs.

RECOGNIZE> RELEASE> RELAX> RESMILE> [RETURN]> REPEAT.

You know I have been to a lot of meditation retreats. I mean a LOT. For twenty years, I was caught up with this just like anybody else

was, that I was being very serious with the meditation and I was trying very hard.

This fourth step in the 6Rs is RE-SMILE. Why do you need to re-smile? Because when you put in the wrong kind of effort, you never progress with your meditation. You always have problems arising with your meditation. The meditation is supposed to be fun. Life is supposed to be fun.

Meditation is life. Life is Meditation as long as you practice it.

When you smile, at that moment, you are practicing all of the 8- Fold Path at the same time! Your mind is alert. You are able to see how mind's attention moves from one thing to another. You can see that without getting attached. **What does the attachment mean? It means taking thoughts and feelings personally.** Letting go of that! You start experiencing more and more of what life is supposed to be like, and that is, having fun!

If you've ever been around kids when they are two or three years old, they have fun. They're curious. They want to see what everything is. This meditation practice develops this kind of mind.

The more interested you become in how mind's attention moves from one thing to another, the more you see how you cause your own pain and you start letting go of it and then, you become truly alive.

So when you are living your daily life, I'm going to give you a challenge right now. For the next week, as much as you can remember to do it, I want you to smile! Smile into everything. I don't care if you feel like it or not!

We had this one man, he was coming to the website and he was talking with me very much. He is practicing a different kind of meditation and finally he wasn't getting it and he became frustrated and so I said: "Ok, stop meditating altogether. I just want you to smile for one week." He took it seriously and he did it.

Later on, he wrote back and he said, "I want to give you some of the observations of what happened during this week. When I smiled, even if I didn't feel like smiling, it made my perspective different and it made it easier to smile in the future! He said, I used to walk around going from one place to another in a mental haze thinking about this or thinking about that, and, when I started smiling, my posture changed. I started standing up more straight. When I started smiling, people started smiling back to me. That's amazing. They never did that before. They actually started to come closer to me and to talk with me and they never did that before. Smiling for one week changed his perspective. It improved his mindfulness. It made him more alert to what his mind was doing and he let go of immeasurable amounts of suffering.

"All I'm saying is Try it. That's all I'm asking and when you can, come and visit me in Missouri."

[Transcript by SK]

Jan 30, 2008