

SN 46:54 Accompanied by Lovingkindness – Mettāsahagata Sutta
Dhamma Talk presented by Bhante Vimalaramsi
25-Aug-07
Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center

BV: Sighs. Ok, this sutta tonight, is one that has, caused quite a stir, when I found this in The Samyutta Nikaya, because the standard way of practicing Loving-Kindness, that I learned through the Visuddhimagga, is that Loving-Kindness will take you to the third jhana. Compassion will take you to the third jhana. Joy will take you to the third jhana. Equanimity will take you to the fourth jhana. And that's what an awful lot of people believe. Now this particular sutta is from The Samyutta Nikaya; it's the Bojjhangasamyutta. Bojjhanga means the enlightenment factors, and this is the enlightenment factors accompanied by Loving-Kindness, page 1607 in The Samyutta Nikaya, verse number 54(4)

SN 46:54

On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Koliyans, where there was a town of the Koliyans {...} Then, in the morning, a number of monks dressed and, taking their bowls and robes, entered Haliddavasana for alms Then it occurred to them: "It is still too early to walk for alms {...} Let us go to the park of the wanderers of other sects."

BV: In all of the towns, they had meeting places for the ascetics, and quite often it was in a park. But it would have a roof over it, things like that, so that you could stay out of the rain, but you could still discourse with people with different ideas.

SN:

Then those monks went to the park of the wanderers of other sects. They exchanged greetings with those wanderers and, when they had concluded their greetings and cordial talk, sat down to one side. The wanderers then said to them: "Friends, the ascetic Gotama teaches the Dhamma to his disciples thus: 'Come, monks, abandon the five

hindrances, the corruptions of the mind that weaken wisdom, and dwell pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with lovingkindness, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with lovingkindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. Dwell pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with compassion, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. Dwell pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with altruistic joy, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with altruistic joy, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. Dwell pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to oneself, dwell pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will.'

"We too, friends, teach the Dhamma to our disciples thus:

'Come, friends, abandon the five hindrances ...

BV: And he goes through the whole thing again.

SN:

{...}

So, {...} what here is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the ascetic Gotama and us, that is, regarding the one Dhamma teaching and the other, regarding the one manner of instruction and the other?"

Then those monks neither delighted in nor rejected the statement of

those wanderers. Without delighting in it, without rejecting it, they rose from their seats and left, thinking, "We shall learn the meaning of this statement in the presence of the Blessed One."

BV: So, rather than get in some kind of a verbal conflict, and trying to explain it to each other, they were silent. They just: "Ok. We'll find out; maybe get back with you later." Like that.

SN:

Then, when those monks had walked for alms {...} and had returned from the alms round, after their meal they approached the Blessed One. Having paid homage to him, they sat down to one side and reported to him the entire discussion between those wanderers and themselves. The Blessed One said:

"Monks, when wanderers of other sects speak thus, they should be asked: 'Friends, how is the liberation of the mind by lovingkindness developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? { Repeats: Friends, how is the liberation of the mind by lovingkindness developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? } How is the liberation of the mind by compassion developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? How is the liberation of the mind by altruistic joy developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? How is the liberation of the mind by equanimity developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal?' Being asked thus, those wanderers would not be able to reply and, further, they would meet with vexation. For what reason? Because that would not be within their domain. I do not see any monk, in this world with its devas, Māra, and Brahma, in this generation with its ascetics and brahmins, its devas and humans, who could satisfy the mind with an answer to these questions except the Tathagata or a disciple of the Tathagata or one who has heard it from them.

"And how, monks, is the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its

fruit, its final goal? Here, monks, a monk develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness accompanied by lovingkindness ...

BV: Ok, and it goes through the whole thing: the enlightenment factor of investigation of your experience; the enlightenment factor of energy; (Now all of these are accompanied with Loving-Kindness) the enlightenment factor of joy; of tranquility; of collectedness; of equanimity. Ok-

SN:

the enlightenment factor of equanimity accompanied by lovingkindness, based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive,'

BV: And what does that say? When you see things that are not repulsive, you don't go out and grab after them. So you repulse them. You're not getting involved with it.

SN:

he dwells perceiving the repulsive therein. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the unrepulsive <as> repulsive,'

BV: So, it's talking more about keeping balance in your mind.

SN:

he dwells perceiving the unrepulsive therein. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and in the repulsive,' he dwells perceiving the repulsive therein. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and in the unrepulsive,' he dwells perceiving the unrepulsive therein. If he wishes: 'Avoiding both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, may I dwell equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending,' then he dwells therein equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending. Or else he enters and dwells in the deliverance of the beautiful.

BV: The deliverance of the beautiful is talking about getting into the fourth jhana, and experiencing the fourth jhana. Now, one of the

reasons that everybody thinks that Loving-Kindness only goes to the third jhana is because you feel it here [indicating the heart]. But you get into the fourth jhana, you don't feel it anymore. And you start radiating from your head, and they don't see that. So they say: "Well, you can only get to the third jhana with this practice." When in fact, you both know, that's not true.

SN:

Monks, the liberation of mind by lovingkindness has the beautiful as its culmination

BV: Fourth jhana.

SN:

I say, for a wise monk here who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

"And how, monks, is the liberation of the mind by compassion developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? Here, monks, a monk develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness accompanied by compassion ...

BV: And then you go through all the enlightenment factors again.

SN:

{...}

based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive

BV: And all of that stuff.

SN:

{...}

may I dwell equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending,' then he dwells therein equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending. Or else, with the complete transcendence of perceptions of forms, with the passing away of perceptions of gross sensory impact, with nonattention to perceptions of diversity,

BV: That sentence has got to be taken out, that's all there is to it. Because there is attention to perceptions to change, and they're saying there's non attention to it, and it can't be.

SN:

aware that 'space is infinite,' he enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of space. Monks, the liberation of mind by compassion has the base of the infinity of space as its culmination, I say, for a wise monk here who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

BV: In other words, you haven't gone on.

So, it's saying right here, that compassion is experienced in the arupa jhana of infinite space.

S: What is compassion though? I don't know the difference between compassion and Loving-Kindness.

BV: Keep practicing. Tell me when you see a change in the feeling. And I'm not talking about location; I'm talking about quality of the feeling.

SN:

"And how, monks, is the liberation of the mind by altruistic joy developed? What does it have as its culmination, its destination, its fruit, its final goal? Here, {...} a monk develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness accompanied by {...} joy ...

BV: And accompanied by all of the others. And –

SN:

the enlightenment factor of equanimity accompanied by {...} joy, based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. If he wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive,' he dwells perceiving the repulsive therein.... If he wishes: 'Avoiding both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, may I dwell equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending,' then he dwells therein

equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending. Or else, by completely transcending the base of the infinity of space, aware that 'consciousness is infinite,' he enters and dwells in the base of the infinity of consciousness. {...} the liberation of mind by altruistic joy has the base of the infinity of consciousness as its culmination, I say, for a wise monk here who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

BV: So we're talking about, when, you get to a certain depth, in your practice, and your mind becomes calm, then the feeling of Loving-Kindness changes to a feeling of compassion, and then you start feeling the infinity of space. As your mind becomes even more calm, then the feeling of compassion changes to a feeling of joy. This is not the same kind of joy that you're used to. And you start seeing individual consciousnesses arising and passing away. And this is at all of the sense doors, but it's most easily seen through the eyes, because about eighty five percent of our senses is really through our eyes. And that's not to say you won't see it at the other sense doors, you will. But this one you really notice, much more easily.

SN:

"And how, monks, is the liberation of the mind by equanimity developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? Here, monks, a monk develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness accompanied by equanimity ...

BV: And then you go through all of those.

SN:

the enlightenment factor of equanimity accompanied by equanimity,

BV: And this is where equanimity gets very strong.

SN:

based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. If he wishes: 'May I dwell <with> the repulsive in the unrepulsive,' {...}... If he wishes: 'Avoiding both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, may I dwell equanimously, mindful and clearly comprehending,' then he dwells therein equanimously, mindful and

clearly comprehending. Or else, by completely transcending the base of the infinity of consciousness, aware that 'there is nothing,' he enters and dwells in the base of nothingness. Monks, the liberation of mind by equanimity has the base of nothingness as its culmination, {...}

BV: Ok, that's as high, or deep, as the brahma viharas will take you. Now, when you start looking at those spaces in between the consciousnesses, then you'll start noticing that mind is not looking outside of itself any more. There's nothing. But there's still stuff. Now this is where you really get to fine tune your energy. When the feeling of joy changes to the feeling of equanimity, and you're radiating that equanimity in all directions at the same time, and without any boundary or limits, that is your object of meditation. But you will notice that you still have the five aggregates, you still have the enlightenment factors, you can still have, and be knocked out of the jhana if your mindfulness isn't sharp enough, and you will experience restlessness, or dullness of mind, depending on the amount of energy you're putting into watching. It's real important now to keep adjusting the energy little bit by little bit. And what I mean by that is the energy you're putting into watching. Ok, as you're observing. If you put a little bit too much energy into it, you get restless. And it's not just restlessness that comes up; there's the dislike of it. So you get to work with that for a little while, but you let go very quickly. And what you're teaching yourself now is to really, really have strong balance, and you're teaching yourself more and more about how to use the six R's automatically, to adjust them. And when it starts happening by itself, then you'll go deeper. Now the reason that you only go to the realm of nothingness with the brahma viharas is because that's as far as feeling goes, and the brahma viharas is a feeling meditation.

Now you get into a space where you're sitting and you think: "I've been sitting for a long time, and it seems like I've been asleep. Is it possible to sit really, really still, and still be asleep?" But when you come out of that, you start reflecting on what happened while you were in that state, and there's still things that are happening. And as you reflect, you'll start to see how your automatic habit of the six R's

starts to take over and you don't become involved with things that... I don't want to talk too much about it. But, there will be the reflecting and the realizing: "Ah, this is what was happening then." And how your mindfulness and the six R's just release it and relax and continue.

Now when you get into the arupa jhanas, your mind is getting into vibration, not movement, so much. As you go deeper in, the vibration becomes less and less. And when you get to neither-perception-nor-non-perception, one of the amazing things that happens is, before, you felt everything expanding, now you feel it getting smaller and smaller and smaller until you can't really tell whether it's there or not. There's slight vibration, slight movement of mind. But you keep relaxing. See that's the whole thing, with the six R's, that relaxing step, that took you from your mind doing this, and flip-flopping all over the place, to being able to see slight tiny movements, and eventually, you'll get to a place that it stops.

You'll be in that state for a period of time. It's just like somebody flips the lights out. Just stops. When the perception and feeling come back, that's when you see the links of Dependent Origination, and the Four Noble Truths. And you see the cessation of all of that. And it's such a big: "Oh, wow.", that your mind goes into the unconditioned. When you let go of that last bit of ignorance, how can you talk about there being anything else arising? It's just an unconditioned state. So, this is what we're after; this is what we're working for, but, you will experience joy like you've never experienced before. And you come and you say: "Bhante, I've just had this experience.", and I get you to talk about it, and then I say: "Well, ok, go sit." (Laughs) "Continue."

S: Bring the energy back up.

BV: Oh, you don't need it back up; you need to balance it now, because it's really strong, and it's very difficult to sit at that time. But I don't care. You got to go sit. (Laughs) You have experienced the path knowledge, and, what I'm interested in, is having you experience not only the path knowledge, but the fruition knowledge.

Now when the fruition occurs, it can happen fast, but for most people that I've seen, it just doesn't happen right away. Ok, one of the reasons I tell you to go sit, is to see whether it can happen for you right away.

But you start becoming much more aware of Dependent Origination in everything, and you start seeing it, and you wouldn't consider breaking a precept; you want to keep your mind as pure as possible, so you let go of a lot of your old habitual ways of thinking and doing things, and now you start doing the more wholesome kind of way. And, you can be washing the dishes, you can be taking a bath, and all of a sudden, you feel it starting to come on again. You feel your mind starting to go deep. So you stop what you're doing; you go sit.

And, there are four steps of enlightenment. If you see Dependent Origination arise and pass away one time, that means you have experienced the fruition of sotapanna. And with the fruition of sotapana, there is personality change. You never again believe that anything is personal. You see everything as being an impersonal process. You don't ever have any doubt arising as to whether this is really the right path or not. You know that it's the right path. You completely let go of any ideas that rites and rituals will lead to nibbana. Ok, those are the major changes that happen in your personality. Your personality starts to get softer. You won't break any precepts on purpose.

Now, if, while you are sitting and you see Dependent Origination arise and cease two times, very quickly, then you have experienced the fruition of the second stage of enlightenment, sakadagami. The lust and the hatred are weakened very much.

Now, it's a real interesting phenomena, that during the time of the Buddha, many people became sotapannas and sakadagamis just by listening to what the Buddha was saying, and comprehending it, and they might listen to a Dhamma talk and they go back and they start thinking about it and start thinking about how they see these things. Say he gave a talk about Dependent Origination and they start looking at Dependent Origination in everything, and you're teaching

yourself how that actually works. You can become enlightened at that time. Doesn't happen very often. But it does happen.

Now, if you're sitting and you see the Dependent Origination arise and pass away three times very quickly, then you have the unconditioned experience, when you come back, you'll notice that you have had a major personality change. No lust or hatred of any kind will come up in your mind, no matter what happens to you. It will never come up again.

Or, if you're sitting, you can have it arise and pass away four times. If that happens, not only do you experience all of the other fetters that I've told you about, you experience the fact that restlessness will never arise again in your mind. Torpor will never again arise in your mind. the desire to experience other realms will never arise in your mind again. Pride, conceit, will never arise in your mind again. And also ignorance will never arise in your mind again. Now these last five fetters are subtle.

If you experience the third stage of sainthood, that's being an anagami, you can still have some little traces of pride. It's not that you're, uh, I don't know how to explain it exactly. It's not that you're, personally attached to it, but you think what you did is pretty good.

S: Which it is.

BV: Well, yeah, it is. There's no getting around it, but there is a slight attachment to the clinging of it. So, you can say: "Well, what's going to happen to me if I have this experience?" And my answer is: "Honestly, I don't know." - "Well, I don't want to be this. I want to be that." - "Ok." (Laughter) (Sighs) I have had some students, that in past lifetimes, they remembered past lifetimes, and in past lifetimes they've remembered making a determination to experience this level or that level, and that's what happened to them. So I have to suspect that this will happen if you make a determination not to go any higher than, this level or that level, that that determination is very strong, and it will kind of influence it. But you can't ask me, because I don't know. Only guy that knew was the Buddha. He knew that if

you continue on this path, you will experience this. But if you stop, you won't experience it.

So, this particular sutta is very, very important, in helping people let go of wrong view of what the Loving-Kindness is all about. I've said it myself when I was practicing Mahasi Sayadaw's method: "Well, Loving-Kindness, it will only get you into jhana. The Loving-Kindness and the brahma viharas lead you directly to nibbana. They don't take you all the way; they lead you up as far as they can go, and then there are some, other little tiny attachments that you have to let go of, and when you get into the realm of nothingness, that's when you'll be able to see what happens before mind starts moving. And I'm not going to tell you. (Laughs) You got to tell me.

So, when I ran across this sutta, I was very shocked by it. And then I started writing to a lot of other teachers that had been telling me the other method, and saying: "Go to this page, look at this page, it's one six o seven, go there and read that." And now there are teachers that are teaching absorption meditation, but they're talking about samatha vipassana. That's what I teach, samatha vipassana. They don't have the definition very good yet. But it's finding these kind of suttas and showing where there has been some wrong thinking along the way, is starting to open up a lot more of people's thinking. And of course there's going to be some people that are attached, and some people that will still criticize, but that's theirs, I don't care.

One of the things that Khema is continually amazed by, is how much courage I have to come out and say: "I know you've been practicing this way for thirty five years, but look at that!" But I can't help myself. And it's ingrained. I want everybody to be able to experience a lot of the things that I've experienced through meditation, and I know that they can. So I'm real anxious to correct some wrong thinking.

Now, what's the difference between constructive criticism, and criticism? Tell me.

S: Constructive criticism has compassion and Loving-Kindness motivating it.

BV: Yes, there is that, but also it is more impersonal. Ok, constructive criticism is an impersonal process, that means that there's no emotion behind it. So what you're saying is: "You've been practicing this way for a long time; I've just found in this sutta that it says this, and do with it what you want." Now that's constructive criticism. And it's not politically correct to come out and say something like that, because politically correct means trying to agree with everybody no matter what, and it doesn't happen.

So we have to be able to be open enough not to get emotional, and if we can stay balanced when we show other people these things, they're start to hear it over a period of time. And I've been back in this country nine years, and that's what's starting to happen. People are starting to actually listen and I run across teachers every now and then that have been teaching the arupa jhanas in absorption, and I show them this kind of stuff, and say: "There's another way, you ought to look at it." So, we'll wait and see.

One of the things that U Silananda impressed upon me when I first started practicing and being his attendant and that sort of thing, was: "Don't grow fast. Grow slowly. Get a good foundation. And then everything will take off by itself." That's what I've been trying to do in the last nine years. I've had opportunities to be at other places where there was a lot of people that would listen to me, but it would be like a flash in the pan. And what I want is people that are really ready and willing to come and go through the changes and see this stuff is real. And then when you go back out into your society, you can show other people how real it actually is. And that's the only way I can see Dhamma lasting in this century.

We have people that they love being therapists and going to the end of what ever the pain is that's causing me my upset. But that's not really letting it go. Why? Because there's still tension and tightness there.

So, eventually, over a period of time, many people will start to catch it.

So.

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