

## Vipassana: Meditation or Misunderstanding?



Vipassana is a very old meditative technique, which was developed by Buddha, following his own breakthrough while sitting under the Bodhi tree. As Buddhism migrated northward and eastward from India, various schools of vipassana were created. Despite there being some variations among them, they all claim to follow the original teaching of Buddha. Vipassana means 'insight meditation'. Its purpose is to uncover the illusory nature of existence (defined by the 'three marks of existence': pain, impermanence and no-self). Before practicing insight meditation, an adept is supposed to develop mindfulness and concentration (*samatha*) through, for instance, the practices of *anapana* (concentration on breathing through the nose) or abdominal breathing. After he has concentrated his mind, he can then proceed either to watching the mind and bodily sensations or to vipassana itself.

The assumption underlying vipassana practice is that one becomes liberated through realizing the empty nature of existence. But what is the connection between having insight into impermanence and spiritual actualization? Is there really a relationship of cause and effect here? There is not; the whole thing just doesn't add up. Although vipassana creates the illusion of being scientific, it is surprising to realize how dogmatic it actually is. A Christian believes Jesus will save him and a Buddhist believes there is no-self (*anatta*). Vipassana is just another doctrine, another mental fabrication, which doesn't point to reality at all.

An adept can convince himself that there is no-self by contemplating the empty nature of all the elements (the five *skandhas*) arising in consciousness. Through this, he may even reach the point where he actually 'experiences' no-self. But, in fact, the mind experiences whatever it conditions itself to believe in. What these contemplations truly reveal are the illusory nature of *lower consciousness* and the falseness of the unintelligent contemplator. If vipassana is useful at all, it is because it can make a person more conscious of the facts that he is totally fragmented and incomplete. It does not show us the nature of reality; it reveals to us the emptiness of ignorance. From an existential standpoint, it is true we have no self prior to awakening. But it is wrong then to conclude there is no self in the essence of our being; there isn't one there because people are simply too unconscious to have developed – or awakened – their higher identity. Their self actually has to be born, not foolishly negated.

Why do we enter the spiritual path? What is really missing from our life? What is the true cause of our suffering, our real pain? We suffer, not because it is the nature of life and impermanence, but because we are so miserably lost and disconnected from our pure nature. We suffer, not because we haven't realized there is no-self, but because we do not have a self yet. Our self has to be brought into existence, actualized, born through our spiritual awakening. As such, the preconceptions of vipassana are in conflict with the very thing that can free us from our pain – the awakening of our soul.

The fact that thousands of seekers sit in vipassana retreats contemplating impermanence or observing their sensations instead of actually meditating, is just sad. What it tells us is that humanity is simply very unevolved. A seeker may be clever and may understand the exceedingly complicated principles of Buddhist philosophy, but is this really wisdom? These concepts have been born through excessive philosophizing in overly intellectual environments, where monks apparently had nothing better to do than analyze trivial things rather than find a clear path to enlightenment. To be intelligent is to aspire to gain the right knowledge: knowledge which is directly useful in the task of finding peace and realizing our true self.

When people sit in retreat for ten days, they can certainly develop mindfulness as well as some semblance of calm, through creating a sense of detachment from the contents of their neurotic minds. This may be an acceptable practice for unconscious people, or for those who have no real aspiration to know themselves, but it should be made clear that this is not meditation; from a spiritual perspective



it is an abomination. While these types of practices may be of therapeutic value for some, they cannot in any way manifest awakening. Moreover, when done to excess they are actually spiritually harmful. For instance, through watching one's mind, breath or sensations too much, one develops an overly active observer. Many vipassana practitioners become addicted to watching; they cannot enter the state of meditation, because their attention is constantly drawn toward objects. Furthermore, year after year of 'watching' turns one into a robot; it slowly kills one's very life force, passion and inspiration to live, drying up the flame of creative participation. It is better not to meditate at all than to do it wrongly; doing the wrong practice is playing with fire.

In order to open the state of meditation, one has to get in touch with one's pure subjectivity. Pure subjectivity does not manifest from watching anything or through seeing the illusory nature of the mind and existence. From a higher perspective, the mind is not illusory at all. It is what it is, and when we think from our true self, it is real. What is unreal is that very watcher who is trying to gain clever insights without having a clue *who he is*, and without even having the aspiration to find out. The one who is unreal is the one who wants to have insight into reality, but without first becoming real himself.

The basic assumptions of vipassana are not only incorrect, but spiritually damaging. They are obstacles to our awakening, which stand in the way of our path and point us in the wrong direction. They block our potential for actualizing our soul, because they keep us living in denial of our individual existence. In striving to reach nirvana by self-negation, one begins to live in a barren land of negative emptiness, exiled even further from the path back to the light of the self. A true seeker must activate his spiritual intelligence in order to decode his real purpose. He should not just conform to concepts his mind finds convincing. He should see his path from the perspective of his soul, from that very self he is growing into, for he is the seed that is awaiting to give birth to his own future. If he cannot do this, he will fail to realize his potential or to fulfill his very purpose – and that future may never come to him.

So, why did Buddha teach vipassana if there is no clear link between this practice and our awakening? Firstly, it seems that as a teacher, Buddha desired to reach out to a large number of people. Being wise, he saw the low level of evolution of humanity as a whole and, perhaps, tried to compromise by devising a system of teaching and practice that even seekers of low intelligence and potential could



relate to. It is very likely Buddha also had a secret teaching of much higher quality for his more advanced disciples.

As the story goes, at the end of his life, Buddha gave a final discourse where, instead of talking, he just held up a perfect lotus flower. All of the monks were confused, except Mahakashyapa – his closest disciple – who just smiled. Buddha then said: 'What can be said I have said to you, and what cannot be said, I have given to Mahakashyapa.' This has been called the Flower Sermon: the direct pointing to reality as it is, beyond concepts. For Kashyapa the flower was neither empty nor impermanent – it was real, a true flower of the absolute reality.

One may argue that that one has to go through the process of vipassana first, in order to be able to receive a higher teaching. But this is like walking east when your destination is west. Vipassana might have been a useful tool in its time to help seekers of low consciousness to evolve, but it is not relevant anymore; it is an outdated technology of evolution and meditation. True vipassana – which could very well have been the secret teaching of Buddha – does not lead to insight into the three marks of existence, but insight directly into our pure subjectivity. The objective of spiritual teaching is to help human souls awaken, so they can fulfill the purpose of their creation. The current proliferation of vipassana courses are not teachings – they are the blind leading the blind. But then, if most seekers lack the basic sincerity and discrimination to see this, perhaps it is their path after all.

Blessings

Anadi

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