

Chris Clifford 11-18-2009



Chris Clifford has studied meditation at IMC since 1995. Over the years, she has sat many long retreats at IMS and elsewhere with teachers including Sayadaw U Pandita and Joseph Goldstein. She has served on the IMC board and has been offering basic meditation instruction for the last four years. She is a former software engineer. Currently she manages retreats for The Mountain Hermitage in New Mexico and volunteers tutoring ESL in California.

Wise Attention (part 4 of 4)

Chris continued her talks based on Sutta 2, *Sabbasava Sutta: All the Fermentations*, in The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Mijjhima Nikaya). The Mijjhima Nikaya is available online at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/index.html>

Turning away from sensual desire, ill will, and cruelty helps us become liberated. In the Dvedhavitakka Sutta – Two sorts of Thinking

(<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.019.than.html>), the Buddha tells us that thoughts connected with sensuality, ill-will, and harmfulness do not lead one to Awakening, while those connected with their opposites (renunciation, non ill-will, and harmlessness) do.

The Blessed One said, "Monks, before my self-awakening, when I was still just an unawakened Bodhisatta, the thought occurred to me: 'Why don't I keep dividing my thinking into two sorts?' So I made thinking imbued with sensuality, thinking imbued with ill will, & thinking imbued with harmfulness one sort, and thinking imbued with renunciation, thinking imbued with non-ill will, & thinking imbued with harmlessness another sort.

"And as I remained thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, thinking imbued with [sensuality / ill will / harmfulness] arose. I discerned that 'Thinking imbued with [sensuality / ill will / harmfulness] has arisen in me; and that leads to my own affliction or to the affliction of others or to the affliction of both. It obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to Unbinding.'

"As I noticed that it leads to my own affliction, it subsided. As I noticed that it leads to the affliction of others... to the affliction of both... it obstructs discernment, promotes vexation, & does not lead to Unbinding, it subsided. Whenever thinking imbued with [sensuality / ill will / harmfulness] had arisen, I simply abandoned it, destroyed it, dispelled it, wiped it out of existence.

However, wiping out negative emotions such as ill will is not something that can be done just by wishing it were so. The process for becoming liberated from these emotions involves feeling them and investigating, rather than ignoring them or acting as if they were not there.

When anger arises, we often repeat the incident leading to anger over and over in our minds. We clean up the details mentally, so we are more in the right. We add previous similar incidents to give it fuel, and we start spinning it over and over in our mind, making sure that our anger is totally justified and righteous. Nobody should treat us like this; it's absolutely unfair. We are completely in the right, and it's the other person who is 100% at fault.

However, if we notice the anger as it arises, and how it makes us feel, and watch ourselves try to spin it to maximum self-justification, we have a chance to stop stirring things up. We can't change what happened, but we can control our reaction to it.

We often want to take some action because of our anger. This also benefits from investigation. If we want to punish someone, get even, make them feel bad, make them apologize, etc. then we do not have right intention.

Compassion is the antidote to anger. A woman visiting the Dalai Lama told him how upset and angry she was earlier that day, when she saw a man beating a dog with a stick. "Compassion," the Dalai Lama told her, "is when you feel as sorry for the man as you do for the dog."

Renunciation is an aid to turning away from clinging and sensual desires. The Dalai Lama tells us that renunciation is the spirit of emergence, we are coming out of the fog of desires. The spirit of emergence is freeing, and brings an end to wanting. Monastics do not view renunciation as a constraint. Rather, it is a great freedom, because the mind is not as pulled around by distractions.

The Sabbasava Sutta concludes with a discussion of the seven factors, which, if developed, lead to awakening and the abandonment of the taints.

" And what are the fermentations to be abandoned by developing? There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, develops mindfulness as a factor for Awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for Awakening... persistence as a factor for Awakening... rapture as a factor for Awakening... serenity as a factor for Awakening... concentration as a factor for Awakening... equanimity as a factor for Awakening dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go. The fermentations, vexation, or fever that would arise if he were not to

develop these qualities do not arise for him when he develops them. These are called the fermentations to be abandoned by developing.

1. Mindfulness (*sati*) – Mindfulness is the mother of all other factors. A child may be playing with and focusing attention on toys – mindfulness is like a mother watching that child.
2. Keen investigation of the *dhamma* (*dhammavicaya*) – curiosity and interest in what's happening now. Being right there with it in the moment, rather than a logical analysis.
3. Energy (*viriya*)—arises naturally when interest picks up.
4. Rapture or happiness (*piti*) – A natural enjoyment with freedom and a feeling of safety.
5. Calm (*passaddhi*) – tranquil energy
6. Concentration (*samadhi*) – mindfulness unifies the focus, allowing us to see deeper. Concentration is like putting a camera on a tripod – the photo is much sharper
7. Equanimity (*upekkha*)—the mind does not want more. A deep satisfaction and fully letting go of wanting. A state of not wanting anything else.

(See <http://www.audiodharma.org/talks-sevenfactorsofawakening.html> for Gil Fronsdal's dhamma talks on the seven factors)

These states are most easily cultivated in retreats, but they can be worked on in daily life, too. The key is curiosity – don't struggle with the process or try to "fix it". Immerse yourself in the Dharma until you become "pickled" with it.