

## Understanding Mind

### Still, Flowing Water

- Ajahn Chah

Okay, everyone, pay attention. Don't let your mind focus on this person or that. Create the feeling that right now you're sitting alone on a mountain or in a forest somewhere, all by yourself. What do you have sitting here right now? Just body and mind, that's all, only these two things. Everything sitting in this physical lump here is "body." "Mind" is what's aware of sense impressions and is thinking in the present. These two things are also called nama and rupa. Nama refers to what has no rupa, or form. All thoughts and sensations, such as feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness, are nama. They're all formless. When the eye sees forms, those forms are called rupa. The awareness of forms is called nama. Together they're called nama and rupa, or simply body and mind.

Understand that what's sitting here in the present moment is just body and mind. Everything comes out of these two things. If you want peace, these are the only things you have to know. But the mind at present is still untrained. It's dirty. Unclean. It's not the primal mind. We have to train it by making it peaceful from time to time. We do this with pactice, to practice concentration is to give rise to knowledge, to give rise to discernment. Concentration is a firm intent, focused on a single object.

People come and say, "I try to sit in concentration, but my mind won't stay put. They think their mind's running around, but actually the only things that run are our impressions. For example, look at this hall here: "Wow," you say, "it's so big!" But the hall isn't what's big, just our impression of it. Actually, this hall is just the size it is, not big, not small, but we run around after our impressions of things.

Regarding meditating to find peace, you have to understand what this word "peace" is. If you don't understand it, you won't be able to find it. For example, suppose you brought a pen with you to the monastery today, one that you love, an expensive one that cost 500 or 1000 baht. And suppose that on your way here you put the pen in your front pocket, but later you took it out and put it somewhere else, like your back pocket. Now when you feel for it in your front pocket: It's not there! You panic. You panic because you don't see the truth of the matter. You get all upset. Standing, walking, coming and going, you can't stop worrying about your lost pen. Your misunderstanding causes you to suffer: "What a shame! I've only had it for a few days and now it's lost."

But then you remember, "Oh, of course! When I went to

bathe I put the pen in my back pocket." As soon as you remember this you feel better already, even without seeing your pen. See that? You're happy already; you can stop worrying about your pen. You're sure about it now. As you walk along, you run your hand over your back pocket and there it is. Your mind was lying to you. Your pen wasn't lost, but the mind lied to you that it was. You suffered because you didn't know. Now when you see the pen and your doubts are gone, your worries calm down. This sort of peace and calm comes from seeing the cause of the problem: samudaya, the cause of suffering. As soon as you're sure that the pen is in your back pocket, there's nirodha, the cessation of suffering.

So you have to contemplate to find peace. What people usually refer to as peace is simply the calming of the mind, not the calming of the defilements. You're just sitting on top of your defilements, like a rock sitting on the grass. The grass can't grow because the rock is sitting on it. In three or four days you take the rock off the grass and it starts growing again. The grass didn't really die. It was just suppressed. The same holds for sitting in concentration: The mind is calmed but the defilements aren't, which means that concentration isn't for sure. To find real peace you have to contemplate. Concentration is one kind of peace, like the rock sitting on the grass. You can leave it there many days but when you pick it up the grass starts growing again. That's only temporary peace. The peace of discernment is like never picking up the rock, just leaving it there where it is. The grass can't possibly grow again. That's real peace, the calming of the defilements for sure. That's discernment.

We speak of discernment and concentration as separate things, but actually they're one and the same. Discernment is just the movement of concentration. They come from the same mind but go in different directions, with different characteristics, like this mango here. A small mango eventually grows larger and larger until it's ripe. It's all the same mango. They're not different ones. When it's small, it's this mango. When it's large, it's this mango. When it's ripe, it's this mango. Only its characteristics change. When you practice the Dhamma, one condition is called concentration, the later condition is called discernment, but in fact virtue, concentration, and discernment are all the same thing, just like the mango.

Actually, in practicing the Dhamma, whatever happens, you have to start from the mind. Do you know what this mind is? What is the mind like? What is it? Where is it? Nobody knows. All we know is that we want to go over here or over there, we want this and we want that, the mind feels

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happy or sad, but the mind itself we can't know. What is the mind? The mind isn't "is" anything. We've come up with the supposition that whatever receives impressions, both good and bad, we call "heart" or "mind." Like the owner of a house. Whoever receives the guests is the owner of the house. The guests can't receive the owner. The owner stays put at home. When guests come to see him, he has to receive them. Who receives sense impressions? Who lets go of sense impressions? That's what we call "mind." But we don't understand it, so we think around in circles: "What is the mind? What is the heart?" Don't confuse the issue like this. What is it that receives impressions? Some impressions it likes and some it doesn't. Who is that? Is there something that likes and dislikes? That's what we call "mind." Understand? Don't go looking far away.

What is the mind? The mind is what receives or is aware of sense impressions. With some sense impressions there's pleasure; with others there's sorrow. The thing that receives impressions leads us to happiness and suffering, right and wrong, but it isn't a thing. We suppose it to be a thing, but it's really only awareness of name and form / body and mind.

People these days keep studying, looking to understand what's right and what's wrong, what's good and evil, but they don't know the concept of rightness-nor-wrongness. All they're looking to know is what IS right and wrong: "I'm going to take only what's right. I won't take what's wrong. Why should I?" If you try to take only what's right, in a short while it'll go wrong. It's right in reaction to wrong. People keep searching for what's right and wrong, but they don't try to find what's neither-rightness-nor-wrongness. They study about good and bad, they search for merit and evil, but they don't study the point where there's neither merit nor evil. They study issues of long and short, but the issue of neither long nor short they don't study.

This knife has a blade, a back, and a handle. When you pick it up, can you lift only the blade? Can you lift only the back of the blade, or the handle? The handle is the handle of the knife; the back, the back of the knife; the blade, the blade of the knife. When you pick up the knife, you pick up all three parts together.

In the same way, if you pick up what's good, what's bad must follow. People search for what's good and try to throw away what's bad, but they don't study what's neither good nor bad. If you don't study this, things never come to an end. If you pick up goodness, badness comes along with it. It follows right along. If you pick up happiness, suffering follows along. They're connected. The practice of clinging to what's good and rejecting what's bad is the Dhamma of beginners. Sure, if you want, you can take just this much, but if you grab onto what's good, what's bad will follow. The end of this path gets all cluttered up.

We rest the mind to make it calm in order to become acquainted with what receives sense impressions, to see what it is. That's why we're told to keep track of the mind, to keep track of "what knows." Train the mind to be pure.

To train the mind in the right way, to make it bright, to develop discernment: Don't think you can do it by sitting.

That's the rock sitting on the grass. People jump to the conclusion that concentration is sitting. That's just a name for concentration, but really, if the mind has concentration, walking is concentration, sitting is concentration — concentration with the walking, concentration with the sitting, the standing, the lying down. That's the practice.

Some people complain, "I can't meditate. It's too irritating. Whenever I sit down I think of this and that, I think of my house and my family. I can't do it. I've got too much bad kamma. I should let my bad kamma run out first and then come back and try meditating." Go ahead, just try it. Try waiting until your bad kamma runs out.

This is how we think. Why do we think like this? That's what we're studying.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you have a pet monkey at home. It doesn't sit still. It likes to jump around and grab hold of things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to the monastery. We have a monkey here too, and this monkey doesn't stay still either. It jumps around and grabs things just the same, but it doesn't irritate you, does it? Why? Because you're acquainted with monkeys. You know what they're like. If you know just one monkey, no matter how many provinces you go to, no matter how many monkeys you see, they don't irritate you, right? That's someone who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys then we won't become monkeys. If you don't understand monkeys, then as soon as you see a monkey, you become a monkey yourself, right? When you see it grabbing this and that, you think, "Grrr!" You get angry and irritated. "That damned monkey!" That's someone who doesn't understand monkeys. Someone who knows monkeys sees that the monkey at home and the monkey in the monastery are the same monkey, and so why should they irritate you? When you understand what monkeys are like, that's enough. You can be at peace. If the monkey runs around, it's only the monkey running. You don't run around with it. You don't become a monkey too. If it jumps in front of you and behind you, you don't get irritated by the monkey — because you understand monkeys, and so you don't become a monkey. If you don't understand monkeys, you become a monkey — understand? This is how the mind grows calm.

We have to know sense impressions, observe sense impressions. Some are likable, some are not, but so what? That's their business. That's what they're like. Just like monkeys. All monkeys are the same monkey. We understand sense impressions. Sometimes they're likable, sometimes they're not. That's what they're like. We have to get acquainted with them. When we're acquainted with them, we let them go. Sense impressions aren't for sure. They're inconstant, stressful, and not-self. We keep looking at them in that way. When the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind receive impressions, we know them, just like knowing monkeys. This monkey is just like the monkey at home. Then we can be at peace.