

We don't belong to ourself

MR.UPUL GAMAGE TALK ON 25TH SEP 2003, IN KANDY

Let us allow our minds to stop wandering a while.

Let us allow our mind to be still. In fact, it is a privilege to experience the stillness of the mind even for a brief moment compared with the perpetually impulsive and temperamental state we come across under normal circumstances. This is because most of us do not know or do not recognise the inherent peaceful and placid nature of our minds.

This ignorance creates unwanted inner conflicts over minute matters, since we lack the skill to look at situations with a calm mind. To some extent, physical stillness causes mental stillness. Thus, when we maintain physical stillness in a particular posture regardless of meditation, our minds tend to relax too.

The relationship between the mind and the body (mind-body connection) is quite strong and one affects the other. For instance, stress causes fatigue. Have you ever observed your walk during stressful time? How do we talk? How do we eat? It is worth observing how we behave or our postures during stress and anxiety.

In general, we associate meditation only with calmness. All of us may have seen or practiced walking-meditation, which we perceive to be walking slowly: dividing the process of walking into many sub-acts over an extended time spell. Nevertheless, this is just one type of walking-meditation and not by any means the only one we may practise. This mindful walking relaxes the mind no matter how intensely agitated it is. Try walking mindfully for ten minutes and you will notice the stress

levels reducing at least by half. Our daily lives can benefit immensely from this type of practical meditation.

On your way home, when you are stressed out or worried, make the last ten steps a walking-meditation: slow down and be mindful of the components of the steps- the lifting, moving, and placing of the foot. You will enter your home refreshed, leaving the stress and fatigue outside.

Walking meditation is not just slow-paced walking, but involves using the walking as the meditation object. Making the walking a meditation object and walking as in meditation are two different things. How do we use the process of walking as a meditation (object? One method is to watch or observe and identify the varying emotions that arise in the mind. How do we walk? Watch the impulsive tension emanating from the body!

Observe the state of mind when doing the dishes: the connection between the mind-state and the action –doing the dishes or closing the door. Let these acts be the mirror that reflects the mind; they are part of our meditation.

The true purpose of walking meditation is to know the mind. It is only through meditation that the mind can be seen as it really is. Nobody even knows where the mind is located in human beings. No researcher or scientist has developed a tool or a machine to detect the mind. Thus, we need to find a way or a tool to get to know it.

Our behaviour or bodily actions are an effective mirror to reflect the mind. We may also watch how other people walk. When there is free time, go to the city and watch the way people walk for a few minutes. This practice is an effective meditation. The *Satipattana Sutta* in its teaching on walking-meditation suggests, very clearly, that we watch how people walk: my walk as well as other people's walk.

These are two variations of walking meditation that we should practise, because walking teaches us many lessons. What happens (to the posture) when a person walking in a hurry sees a particular product being sold on

the pavement? The rushing ceases or slows down. These movements of ours or of other people or even of other animals can be used to study the mind. Watch the movements of animals; how do animals run or walk? If possible watch daily for a few minutes the manner in which a cat or a dog walks or the way a bird flies.

As a result of observing the movements of animals –walking, running or flying- even briefly, the agitated mind relaxes considerably. The tension is released. Not only that, but it also helps to know the animal better inwardly. In humans, sensitivity toward the animal under observation may be developed. It may not happen overnight. Nevertheless, non-verbal communication may take place between the two species. From the observation of inorganic objects too, we can learn many things about ourselves.

As some of you may remember, sometime back, the entrance to the Nillambe meditation centre was over-grown. Most of those who came for meditation used to comment on the untamed courtyard with concern, followed by suggestions for improvement while I managed to evade the inquiry with vague replies.

This continued to happen. Later on, a group of Forest Sangha from local and foreign communities came for meditation and were highly impressed with the breathtaking views, the environs as well as the conduct of the meditators. As usual, they too suggested that it would be nicer to have the garden tamed and to grow flowering plants instead of the weeds or the natural surroundings.

In order to respect their views, the weeds were cleared and flowering plants were grown. And, in addition, a pond was built by digging the ground, filling it with water and then planting some water-lilies. While weeding the ground, I dreamt of a beautiful garden where lotuses are in bloom and the walking paths loop around the pond. Here, I was only clearing the wild even though I had a mental picture of the final result.

Once the pond and the water-lily plants were in place, every morning I used to check out the pond expecting the first flower to bloom. The days

went by without even a hint of a flower while leaves drifted endlessly. Flowers do not bloom in a hurry, despite our desire and impatience to see them.

One day, there was a water-lily bud and I was thrilled. The bud stayed under-water for some time. Now, there was a renewed hope of seeing a flower emerging from the bud: checking out the pond daily to see the flower. In the mean time, more buds sprang up. Somehow, one fine morning, the blue water-lily was in bloom as the day broke. Following the rhythm of the sun, the flower closed in the evening and opened again the following morning. That was how the first ever water-lily blossomed bringing happiness to everyone.

Everyone admired it and the discussion about it went on. After some time, the flower began to fade; the colour disappeared: the glossy purple colour gradually became dull. However, the process of opening and closing continued regardless of the colour fading. One morning, it failed to open. In the early days, since the desire to see a flower was greater, there was much care such as feeding it with manure for the plant. Now, the flower has given us enough time to realise that nothing -adequate water, fertiliser or sun light- could give life to it any longer. With that insight, the purple-water-lily withered completely.

Reflecting on the entire incident, we can see some insights about life, the universal laws arising from the story. We do not understand the fact that any flower, not only the water-lily, exists because of numerous things that are non-flower.

For instance, we fail to see that things, which are not a rose, make the existence of a rose possible: the earth is not a rose; the wind is not a rose; the sunlight is not a rose. Besides, in every passing moment, it becomes the state of a non-rose or less of a rose; and once it is faded, it is no longer a rose. The water-lily went through a gradual change to reach the non-water-lily state.

Have you ever seen the journey of deterioration of the water-lily into a non-water-lily state, the moment to moment deterioration? At the end of the journey, the petals dropped into the water, floated for some time and

then sank to the bottom of the pond and became part of the soil. Perhaps, the dead water-lily may have nurtured the succeeding flowers. On the one side, this phenomenon is cyclic.

Today, the only thing we notice is a blossoming of a new flower. And, tomorrow or the day after, we may see it withering. This is the limited perceptual boundary within which we operate. We, for a moment, fail to realise that the things we see exist due to the support of numerous external matters/causes that are out of our sight and control: sunlight is chiefly instrumental in the blossoming and existence of water-lilies. We cannot bring sunlight into the scene forcibly. Has it ever occurred to you that the Sun that orbits millions of miles away influences the flowering of the plant you grow in your garden? Sunlight is essential despite the great distance away that it is.

Similarly, even to fulfil our other hopes, the support of the distant objects is needed: the things that are beyond our reach and control are needed.

Thus, we truly do not have the power to fulfil all the hopes that arise in the mind despite our happiness at the fulfilment of a particular expectation. This is simply because many things of which we have no control over affect the fulfilment of our hopes and expectations.

Looking at a withering flower, we assume that it is the end. Actually, the same flower is manifested in the succeeding flowers by becoming the base or fertiliser for the new flowers, though it is not the same old flower. Nothing is destroyed totally in this cyclic existence or exists forever. We love to go to the extremes in our expectations: to believe that my belongings, my people, conditions and me that make me happy-health, wealth, political situation etc. exist continuously.

We like to dream of eternity or permanence. The belief that physical objects and psychological relationships are permanent is one extreme. The other extreme is the belief that everything gets destroyed at death, regardless of our living a moral or immoral life.

Those who subscribe to the view of externalism or permanence accumulate material objects in a miserly way rather than wholeheartedly enjoying themselves while preventing others from doing so. The other group believes that everything is totally destructible and life is not worth living. Nevertheless, both views are false: nothing is permanent or completely destroyable. This is exactly what the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppada*) in Buddhism teaches us. The two schools of thought that dominated the world prior to the insight into Dependent Origination were Externalism (*sassata vaada*) and Annihilations (*uccheda vaada*).

However, the mindful observation of a flower and its cycle of existence enable us not to believe in the view of permanence and also to break the myth of total destruction: to reject both extremes of Externalism and Annihilations. Not only a flower, but any life situation or incident teaches us the same lesson.

A particular object comes into existence when all the essential conditions that are not of this particular object itself come together, as in the water-lily example.

The hitch is that nobody knows what these essential conditions are. For instance, this meditation programme exists not only because of the presence of you and I, but because of numerous other objects/phenomena that have nothing to do with meditation; things that are not the discourse, not the discussion.

For instance, the cement floor is not meditation, not even the discussion and not even the listening, but this programme exists because of the cement floor; even though these walls are not the meditation itself, we are unable to conduct the programme in the absence of them; similarly, the roof is not meditation itself, yet without it the conduct of our meditation programme would not have been possible. Think a little: how the existence of this programme depends on numerous objects that are totally unrelated to meditation itself. Besides, there are many unknown causes affecting the survival of our meditation programme.

This is called selflessness (*anathema*) in the Dhamma. Anathema means that the concept of “I” exists because of many things that do not belong to the “I”, things that are beyond the control of this “I” and the things that are unknown to the ‘I’. The ability to see everything we do in this light, enable us to understand the phenomenon called *anathema*.

Anathema is not a strange concept. It does not mean the nonsense of ‘non-existence of a person’ as some people erroneously believe. For example, let us take “my body.” Do only “my things” support the survival of “my body?” No! The air we breathe does not belong to us; we don’t know who exhaled it or where it originated, before it became ‘my in-breath.’ Nobody knows what will happen to “my out-breath” and where it may end up or whose in-breath it will become next.

At this point, a deep gratitude, a true loving-kindness towards everything, is developed in us. This true feeling of loving-kindness is produced through the diminishing sense of self, the ego entity. It does not limit itself to the air and can be applied universally, even to these trees.

Have you ever realised the contribution these trees make to our programme every Thursday through the process of purifying the air we breathe, in the midst of the heavy flow of traffic? But, not a single tree or a branch or a leaf belongs to us.

On the one hand, this kind of reflection helps lessen the sense of self (ego entity) - the feeling of “I am the One” loses its weight or intensity. On the other hand, it reduces the shock and the disappointment when things don’t go according to our whims and fancies or at the non-fulfilment of our expectations.

This is because now we understand that countless unknown and uncontrollable phenomena have to converge in the right manner for the fulfilment of our hopes. The more we understand the law behind existence, the lesser our disappointment becomes at the non-fulfilment of things. Truly, instead, we should be surprised when the expectations are fulfilled.

Develop the habit of perceiving life situations in this meditative or reflective manner! Go beyond the visible and touch on the deeper levels!

Then, meditation will be able to add certain universal laws or truths - that we have failed to fathom so far - into our lives. Those insights are the final outcome of our sitting meditation. Vipassana (Insight) meditation means perceiving the essence of things, the way things really are at the deepest level and all of us have the potential to develop the deeper insights.

So, when interacting with the world, don't stop at the mere sensory perceptions – seeing, hearing, feelings, emotions etc - but reflect deeply and mindfully. Our level of education does not matter in the development of such insights. If you have the knowledge of what you perceive, if you can maintain intense mindfulness and if you have the drive to proceed deeper without being content with the first inspiration, you possess everything you need to establish an insightful philosophy. Meditation is to develop such a penetrating view about life situations. Let us try to meditate for a few minutes.

MEDITATION

❁ Can we look at our in-breath and out-breath with a feeling of friendliness in order to gain an understanding about our own mind, our own body and our world?

❁ All of our hopes are dependent on this breath

❁ Even though we have many friends who are willing to help us, none can match our breath, our great friend,

❁ It comes calmly, at times even without our knowing, does what is needed and leaves us secretly without even expecting thankfulness or gratitude.

☸ Therefore, we may welcome every in-breath as warmly as we greet a good friend

☸ Let us consider every out-breath with the friendliness and gratitude we have towards a humble friend, who has done us an invaluable favour and is going away with the promise of returning

☸ Watch the inhalation and be aware of the relaxation of body and mind with each inhalation

☸ Recognise the inhalation while being aware of the lightness of the body and mind

☸ Be mindful of the inhalation - be mindful of the exhalation
Realise how we own a breath for one second and then we lose it in the next second

☸ Perhaps we may also understand that perceiving ‘myself ‘as a distinct and unique individual is a myth.

☸ When practising *Anapanasati* meditation all of us who are in this hall become connected to each other through the breath - every moment.

☸ Even those who stay outside the hall connect with everyone else through every inhalation and exhalation: every human, every tree and every animal.

☸ Let us allow a feeling of loving-kindness to develop in us, towards everyone, let it be humans, trees, animals, those who are inside this hall as well as those who are outside the hall.

☸ Let us conclude this meditation by extending the feeling of loving-kindness to every being and everything, and surrounding all in it.