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## *The Luminous Mind*

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There's a passage in the Canon where the Buddha says that the mind is *pabhassaram*: luminous or radiant. He says that when people don't realize this, they can't develop their minds; they can't train the mind. When you realize that the mind is luminous and that its defilements are visitors, then you can train the mind.

In other words, if you believe that greed, anger, and delusion permanently stain the mind, then you believe you can't train yourself. You can't develop the mind. You have to depend on outside forces, outside agents to come and save you. But when you realize that the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion come and visit it—in other words, they don't necessarily own it, they don't leave a permanent stain—then you can train it.

And notice: The Buddha's not saying that the mind is naturally good or that its luminosity is its awakened state. Luminosity here simply means that it knows. Ajaan Maha Boowa has noted that if the Buddha had said the mind is pure by nature, you could argue with him: If it's pure, how can defilements come into it? But the Buddha simply says that it's luminous, which means it can know. Each moment we are able to be aware of things. No matter how many times greed, anger, and delusion have come into the mind, they go. There's always the possibility that you can notice their coming and going, see the effects of their coming and going, and realize that you have the choice of siding with them or not.

That's what enables you to train the mind. No matter how thick the darkness of the mind, it's possible to shine a light in it. And once you shine the light, the darkness can't say, "I've been here for long a time; a tiny little light has no right to drive me away right away." That's not the way light and darkness interact. As soon as light comes, the darkness is gone.

Now you've probably noticed in your practice that there are many times when light comes and then disappears, and the darkness comes back again. That's because your clarity of mind is not yet continuous. But it is something that can be developed. As the Buddha says, we suffer from ignorance partly because of internal causes. In other words, hindrances like sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restless and anxiety, uncertainty obscure the mind. And they keep ignorance going. There's also inappropriate attention. When looking at the hindrances, or looking at the world, we're not really interested in the question of suffering or how to put an end to suffering. We've got other issues, other things we're more interested in. This is related to the external

causes that keep ignorance going. We hang around with the wrong people. We don't listen to the Dhamma. Or even when we do, we don't take it seriously.

So these are the things that keep the darkness going: inappropriate attention and lack of noble friends. Even though the mind has the potential where it can know and be aware, these other factors influence it, which is why we need to train the mind in concentration to overcome the hindrances. To do this, of course, depends on seeing at some point that the reason we're suffering is not because of somebody else somewhere else, or the economic conditions, or the environment or whatever. It's our own ignorance. The moment of clarity that makes us realize we've got to work on ourselves: That's why we look for the right people, want to listen to the Dhamma, want to understand it, and want to practice.

It's during those moments of clarity when you really see the connection between your actions and the suffering you experience—when you recognize your own foolishness: That's when you're less willfully ignorant and can start willing in the other direction. As the description of right effort says, you generate the desire to get rid of unskillful qualities. You generate the desire to develop skillful qualities in their place. These are all activities in the mind. That word "qualities" here, *dhamma*, can also mean actions. Remember that actions are not just things you do with the body, but also things you do with the mind. The path is something you fabricate. It's something you will—a truth of the will. In other words, if you don't will it, it won't become true for you.

So this is what we're working on right now, trying to give the desire for what's skillful more power over the mind, so that there can be more moments of clarity, so that we can begin to weaken the causes of ignorance. And ignorance here is not just a general lack of knowledge. It's very closely connected with inappropriate attention. We're looking at the wrong things. We know the wrong things or we frame the issues of our life in the wrong way. We need to become more and more consistent in looking at things in terms of the principle of skillful action, and then in terms of the principle of where there's suffering, what's causing it, what we can do to put an end to it. We want to make those questions the big questions in life. Ordinarily we miss out on these questions because so many other questions really seem insistent—the things we pick up from our own random ideas or from the general values of society—which is one of the reasons why meditation requires that we learn to question the values we were brought up with, the ideas we picked up in the past, our narratives about the past, the way we cast those narratives.

When you look back on your life, learn to recast the narrative. You can't just drop the old narratives of your life, pretend that they didn't happen, that you've shut the door on them and you're no longer

involved. They'll just keep sloshing around in the mind in the same old terms in which you've been framing them before. So you've got to reframe those narratives. Look at them in terms of where there was suffering, why there was suffering, what activity kept you suffering on and on and on in that particular way, and when you finally began to realize that you had to drop that kind of activity—that you *could* drop that kind of activity. When you can look at your life in that way, it's a lot easier to look at the present moment in the right way as well.

So the process of meditation is not just pinning the mind in the present moment and putting it through the grinder of a