

The Sound Of Silence -- by Ajahn Sumedho

As you calm down, you can experience the sound of silence in the mind. You hear it as a kind of high frequency sound, a ringing sound that's always there. It is just normally never noticed. Now when you begin to hear that sound of silence, it's a sign of emptiness — of silence of the mind. It's something you can always turn to. As you concentrate on it and turn to it, it can make you quite peaceful and blissful. Meditating on that, you have a way of letting the conditions of the mind cease without suppressing them with another condition. Otherwise you just end up putting one condition over another.

This process of putting one condition on top of another is what is meant by making 'kamma'. For example, if you're feeling angry, then you start thinking of something else to get away from the anger. You don't like what is going on over here, so you look over there, you just run away. But if you have a way of turning from conditioned phenomena to the unconditioned, then there is no kind of kamma being made, and the conditioned habits can fade away and cease. It's like a 'safety hatch' in the mind, the way out, so your kammic

formations, "sankharas", have an exit, a way of flowing away instead of recreating themselves.

One problem with meditation is that many people find it boring. People get bored with emptiness. They want to fill up emptiness with something. So recognise that even when the mind is quite empty, the desires and habits are still there, and they will come and want to do something interesting. You have to be patient, willing to turn away from boredom and from the desire to do something interesting and be content with the emptiness of the sound of silence. And you have to be quite determined in turning towards it.

But when you begin to listen and understand the mind better, it's a very realisable possibility for all of us. After many years of practice, gross kammic formations fade away, while the more subtle ones also start to fade away. The mind becomes increasingly more empty and clear. But it takes a lot of patience, endurance and willingness to keep practising under all conditions, and to let go even of one's most treasured little habits.

One can believe that the sound of silence is something, or that it is an attainment. Yet it is not a matter of having attained anything, but of wisely reflecting on what you

experience. The way to reflect is that anything that comes and goes; and the practice is one of knowing things as they are.

I'm not giving you any kind of identity — there is nothing to attach to. Some people want to know, when they hear that sound, 'Is that stream-entry?' or 'Do we have a soul?' We are so attached to the concepts. All we can know is that we want to know something, we want to have a label for our 'self '. If there is a doubt about something, doubt arises and then there is desire for something. But the practice is one of letting go. We keep with what is, recognising conditions as conditions and the unconditioned as the unconditioned. Is's as simple as that.

Even religious aspiration is seen as a condition! It doesn't mean that you shouldn't aspire, but it just means that you should recognise aspiration in itself as being limited. And emptiness is not self either--attachment to the idea of emptiness is also attachment. That also is to be let go of ! The practice then becomes one of turning away from conditioned phenomena, not creating anything more around the existing conditions. So whatever arises in your consciousness--anger or greed or anything--you recognise it

is there but you make nothing out of it. You can turn to the emptiness of the mind--to the sound of silence. This gives the conditions like anger a way out to cessation; you let it go away.

We have memories of what we have done in the past, don't we? They come up in consciousness when the conditions are there for them to come. That is the resultant kamma of having done something in the past, having acted out of ignorance and having done things out of greed, hatred and delusion, and so forth.... When that kamma ripens in the present, one still has the impulses of greed, hatred and delusion that come up in the mind as the resultant kamma. Whenever we act on these ignorantly, when we aren't mindful, then we create more kamma.

The two ways we can create kamma are with following it or trying to get rid of it. When we stop doing these, the cycles of kamma have an opportunity to cease. The resultant kamma that has arisen has a way out, an 'escape hatch' to cessation.