

Excerpts from The Way It Is by Luang Por Sumedho

So in practice we are looking at the universe as it is being reflected in our minds. It does not matter what anyone else happens to experience; one meditator will sit here and experience all sorts of brilliant lights, colours, fascinating images, Buddhas, celestial beings, even smell wonderful odours, and hear divine sounds, and think, 'What a wonderful meditation, such brilliance came, "the radiance" -- a divine being came like a radiant angel, touched me and I felt this ecstasy. The most wonderful ecstatic experience of my whole life...waited my whole life for this experience.'

Meanwhile the next one is thinking, 'Why doesn't something like that ever happen to me. I sat for a whole hour in pain with an aching back, depressed, wanting to run away, wondering why on earth I'd come to this retreat anyway.'

Another person might say, 'I can't stand all those people who have those silly ideas and fantasies, they disgust me, they just develop this terrible hatred and aversion in me. I hate the Buddha image sitting in the window, want to smash it. I hate Buddhism and meditation!'...

When you talk to someone who sees devas and experiences bright lights, you start doubting your own practice and think, 'But maybe I am not capable of enlightenment. Maybe I am not meditating right.' Doubt itself is impermanent. Whatever arises passes away. So the good meditator is the one who sees the impermanent nature of bliss and ecstasy, or

experiences dullness, experiences anger, hatred and aversion, and reflects on the impermanent nature of those qualities, when sitting, walking or lying down.

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, blissful. Meditating on that, you have a way of letting the conditions of the mind cease without just suppressing them with another condition. Otherwise you just end up putting one condition over another.

This process 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. This is just putting one condition on top of another. 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 re-creating 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 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. It'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. Let go of that! 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, 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