Presence of Mind Stops the Current · What you catch in time fades before it carries you away

Evening talk at the end of the Rains, 26 October 2026 · Ajahn Jayapañño (ชยปญฺโญ ภิกขุ), Sakon Nakhon · Translated from the Thai (Isan dialect) by Daniel Schwörer, with the teacher's blessing, sādhu

[00:03] Three months (the Rains, the monks' retreat) have simply passed. Three months are gone, and life passes just the same, just like that. Nothing in it is firm and certain. So we must not be heedless. We go step by step, according to our strength. Whatever temperament a person has, whether he likes it sour or likes it sweet: look at your own temperament.

[00:34] Practice (bhāvanā) is about training the knower (in one's own mind). Whatever way of training the knower suits a person, let him do it that way. Do not hold on to the idea that this way is right and that way is wrong. One person says salty tastes good; another says sour tastes good. Taste sits in one's own mouth. It is the same with the ways of practice: if we like this way, we say that way is no good. It is good for the one it is good for.

[01:08] When we catch (a mood) in time, we do not get lost in the enjoyment of it. The delight in it (nandi), the enjoyment: the moment it is seen, it fades. Observe our own heart. It thinks and thinks, it still has thoughts. That is because we do not catch in time what the mind creates (saṅkhāra). We hold on to it until the heart itself becomes like that. And the "knowing" that we think we know, know, know: that is not knowing. That is perception (saññā), remembering. It has not yet actually known the thing itself. So it thinks, it keeps thinking.

[01:57] But if we see that it thinks, if we catch it in time that it thinks, then the thought disappears, it stops, it does not think on. Just catching it in time, that is all. The moods, all these stirrings, we cannot force. We cannot force them to stop, we cannot force them to let go or to become empty. But when presence of mind (sati) catches them in time, they fade in the heart by themselves. And when they keep fading, in the end the heart gives things no more value. What once seemed delicious becomes bland.

[02:47] So it becomes lighter, step by step, lighter, until the mind stands firm. It is in equanimity (upekkhā): not pleased, not displeased. Look carefully, do not get lost. For in the end no one (as a person) becomes an arahant (one who is fully liberated). Having and being (having something, being someone) are finished, the self is finished. What remains is just as it is.

[03:17] Practice differs from monastery to monastery, according to the character and habits of the teachers. No one is right, no one is wrong. Any way is good that brings us to more complete presence of mind and clear comprehension (sati-sampajañña), to wisdom, and to being able to let go. "Letting go" is only a word. You do not need to look for reasons to support letting go. As long as we are still looking for reasons, we cannot let go. It has no cause and no effect; it stands above cause and effect. Letting go stands above cause and effect. As long as a reason is still there, one cannot let go.

[03:58] In practice: do not get lost in the levels of concentration (samādhi) or in the meaning of the word jhāna (deep concentration). Whoever gets stuck in deep concentration, in him no insight-knowledge (ñāṇa) arises. Most people get lost in the levels of concentration and hold on to concentration. Among all those liberated, those liberated by wisdom are the majority. The "dry-insight" ones (sukkhavipassaka, liberated without deep concentration) do not need the power of concentration. They do not see this and that (no images, no other worlds), they do not see like the others. They look like simpletons, but they do not suffer, and they have not got lost anywhere.

[04:50] So the clever one suffers more than the one who is not clever; not that the simpleton does not suffer. Much cleverness, much tension, stress and suffering (dukkha). Much merit (puñña), much having, much being: whoever

comes to practice with these gets stuck in having, stuck in being. But our task is to be there in time at the mood. Shake it off, quickly. Presence of mind catches it, and we throw it off at once. Do not hold on to it.

[05:23] The Buddha taught the Jaṭilas (the fire worshippers) in the Fire Sermon (Ādittapariyāya Sutta). He compared the sense bridges (āyatana: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) to something hot, because the Jaṭilas were familiar with heat: they worshipped fire. Compared with heat, they could understand it easily. The eye is hot. You must let it go quickly, not hold on to it; if you hold on to it, you get burnt. Whoever holds on does not see. It burns at once. The ear … The sense bridges are hot. So you must throw them off quickly, like a glowing coal in your hand: if you hold it, the hand burns, and the burn spreads. So: catch it in time, see it quickly, abandon delight (nandi), enjoyment. Without delight there is no passion (rāga), no lust; and the other way round: without passion, no delight.

[06:28] That is why the discourse on the four foundations of presence of mind (satipaṭṭhāna) says: with presence of mind and clear comprehension, at contact (when a sense meets something) put away liking and disliking, greed and distress (abhijjhā-domanassa). Whoever feels liking (and catches it), in him it fades at once, he does not get stuck in the liking. Whoever feels disliking and sees it in time does not get stuck in the disliking. It fades step by step. Observe carefully when it arises. Take aversion (dosa), that is the easiest to see: when it flares up brightly, the heart pounds, the blood shoots through the body, the breath pants, the body trembles, the ears roar and the eyes flicker.

[07:23] But as soon as presence of mind catches it, we see it fade; the fire grows weaker. Yet if we are heedless again, our presence of mind does not keep up, our wisdom does not keep up. It is as if the fire dies down and we think it is already out. A flame has light, and it has heat. As soon as presence of mind catches it, the light goes out. But what remains, the heat, has not yet faded. The moment we touch that heat, we think of the fire, and the fire flares up again.

[08:08] That is why we do not see the ceasing of suffering: because of the continuation. That is why we think it is permanent. We do not see impermanence (anicca), because it is covered by continuity (santati, the chain without a gap). It is fast. We do not catch it in time, and it arises anew. But it is not the old fire, it is a new fire; it only feeds on the old fuel. Do you understand? When our presence of mind catches it in time, wisdom arises, and we see it fade. Presence of mind is what stops the current (this continuation).

[08:49] It comes down to one thing: presence of mind. Presence of mind is the true friend you can rely on. Let the fire arise, let it flare, let it burn as it will: what matters is that we have presence of mind, recollection. Presence of mind means recollecting; clear comprehension means being aware of oneself. With presence of mind and clear comprehension we do not drift away with feeling, not with perception, not with what the mind creates, not with consciousness. We do not get lost in feeling, not in perception, not in what the mind creates, not in consciousness. In short: we see craving (taṇhā), but we do not become its owner. We just see craving as craving, nothing more.

[09:50] It is like watching children at play. There are five little children: form, feeling, perception, what the mind creates, consciousness (the five aggregates). We do not go in and play along. We sit and watch them play. Soon it starts again, with form: there, a form. This mind, in its delusion, goes in and grabs hold, at form, at feeling, at perception, at what is created, at consciousness. Then the heart is no longer empty. As soon as it grabs, it is no longer empty.

[10:27] "Not knowing is the condition from which creating (saṅkhāra) arises." Take that sentence and test it on yourself. The heart of the teaching is dependent arising (paṭiccasamuppāda: when this is, that comes to be; when this ceases, that ceases). And then look at the other side, the side of ceasing: "Because not knowing fades and ceases, creating ceases." Exactly that. When our presence of mind coincides with the knowing, that is the awake state. So the state of the Buddha is in every one of us. Not that we have never seen it; we simply did not look, at the moments when it merely knows. It knows, and in that knowing there is no opinion. It does not think on. It just knows, and then it is over. Everyone has that. The state of the Buddha is the awake state. Only we do not cultivate it, do not let it grow.

[11:27] The Dhamma the Master (the Buddha) proclaimed belongs to the one who has presence of mind, not to the one who is forgetful and lost. For we let ourselves be fooled by our own thoughts. Good: we think it is good. Bad: we think it is bad. Liking: we like it ourselves. Creating: we create it ourselves. Out of delusion; we take it to be us. But when presence of mind becomes more complete, (we see the chain from its beginning). First: contact. Why is there contact? Because there are still sense bridges, and where there are sense bridges there is contact (phassa). There is the eye, there is form. When an eye is there and a form appears, the eye sees; eye-consciousness arises. But whoever catches it in time merely sees.

[12:34] Many talk about it: "merely seeing", "just that". Only they cannot do it. Whoever can do it has no more problem. Everyone talks about it so cleverly: "just that", "just that". That is the way an arahant sees. That is the teaching the Buddha gave to a man called Bāhiya: "just that" (in the seen, only the seen). Bāhiya heard it once and became an arahant on the spot. So we practise. Our presence of mind becomes more complete and catches it step by step: it arises, it flows, but it gets shorter. The flowing, becoming and birth (bhava and jāti, becoming someone), get shorter, get narrowed down.

[13:25] So we come to be aware of ourselves. We do not carry the knowing around like a possession, we do not carry presence of mind around. Presence of mind too is not-self (anattā): when we are simply there, sometimes it does not arise either. We see it when we look: the time when the mind creates nothing, embellishes nothing. It is simply there, creates nothing, is not heedless. Only we do not understand that state, because it is not yet clear to us. The moment we are like that, the mind wants something again: to talk, to move. Craving arises at once. It jolts through the nerves, the mind writhes, it cannot be held. There it is still lost.

[14:15] But when our presence of mind is there in time: the contact, the consciousness that arises, and presence of mind, recollection, knowing; all three wake up in the same instant. When they fall into one, it ceases right there. It ceases at the knowing, it goes no further. Not that we know nothing; we know. But it does not go beyond the knowing. It merely knows. That depends on the strength of our presence of mind.

[14:55] That is why I keep stressing only the training of presence of mind: training to be aware of ourselves. Sitting and watching the breath is training to be aware of ourselves. Being with oneself, waking up. Then walking meditation: but people walk and chat, walk and admire the birds and the trees, the mouth chatters, the hand takes photos, selfies. Oh dear, such meditators! How is one supposed to get anywhere practising like that? The eyes look at birds and trees, and the heart drifts off who knows where.

[15:32] Walking looks after the aggregates, it looks after the body, because long sitting tires you out, it makes you slack. So we move the legs. But we should keep presence of mind in stepping: walk and be aware of ourselves, watch how the leg moves, look, catch it in time when the sole of the foot touches the ground, the touch that arises there. That is why they (the teachers) do not let you wear sandals for walking meditation. Why? So that our presence of mind wakes up faster. Some wear them anyway.

[16:21] It is the same with the sleeping place: lie on a hard floor. It is uncomfortable, you do not drift off, you do not fall asleep, you do not enjoy lying and sleeping and do not cling to it. These are all means of training that the Buddha laid down. We follow him and practise. Do not grab at the breath: you watch it, but you do not take it, do not hold on to it, do not force it. Whoever stays with mindfulness of breathing (ānāpānasati) has the starting point from which he can watch the breath and the body. That is why I always say: whoever does not know the breath need not talk about practice.

[17:05] Know the breath, know the body, let go of the body; only then comes the study of the mind. Whoever does not yet fully know the body, does not see through it clearly, cannot let it go. As long as doubt is still there, he does not let go. But whoever watches the breath, with some temperaments, begins also to contemplate his own body, to study it, to x-ray himself. Yet that is partly just made up: that one rots, decays, stinks, that the parts fall off the body. That is perception, the perception of the unlovely (asubha-saññā).

[17:56] The true meaning of this perception we do not yet understand. One should bear in mind that the body is not beautiful. But the perception of the unlovely is made up: imagining that one decays, that one rots, that one stinks. It has not got that far (to decaying) yet. It is enough to know that it is not beautiful; then no lust arises. That is a remedy for those who incline to passion, the antidote to the passionate temperament. It is not yet a medicine that cures the illness, only a painkiller. It is not a medicine against the fever, only one against the pain.

[18:41] So we keep looking, our presence of mind looks, we sit and shine a light into our own heart. When something strikes us and we are heedless: so what, do not be annoyed about it. It is not that the cause is there and the result comes at once. It goes step by step. We build up the causes slowly. Do not lie in wait to get something, do not chase after it. Right now it is not enough yet. As long as we chase, as long as we stir ourselves up, it is not enough. So just look. Whatever it knows: do not hold on to the knowing, do not get lost in the knowing.

[19:27] Especially with concentration. I worry about monks: some of those who practise get lost in wrong concentration (micchā-samādhi). They sit, the heart grows still, and then they enjoy it and drift off outward. They crawl into the earth to the green snakes, the earth snakes and the black snakes, then they rise up and chat with the sky spirits, the gods and the giants. They do not stay in their place, they are not aware of themselves. Such concentration is dangerous. That is wrong concentration. It leads to perversion (vipallāsa), in plain village talk: you go mad. It starts with the perversion of view, the view is wrong; from that comes the perversion of perception, you perceive things other than they are; and from that the perversion of the mind. Then the set of three is complete: the mind is perverted.

[20:33] In the end they go to the psychiatric ward. Psychiatry does not cure the perversion of the mind, it treats the body. The drugs act on form (the body), not on the mind. Simply put: they close the workshop in which the perverted mind works. But the mind itself is still there. That is why the safest way to develop concentration is the one the Buddha pointed out: first, mindfulness of breathing.

[21:15] When we watch the breath, go along with it breathing in and breathing out, back and forth, we find delight in it, delight in the breath, and we study at the breath. That is the study of the body. We look step by step. Then you do see something. The mind has its own x-ray machine; the inner eye too can arise. But it is only a seeing, nothing more: seeing means merely seeing. What this seeing does, however, is make the view fade that this body is us.

[21:55] That means: it stops taking this body wrongly for an I. This kind of view is abandoned, the view of a self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), and it can be kept abandoned all the time. Whoever really sees that doubts no more. There is no more "right or wrong"; it just lights up, and it is over, done. Not the slightest doubt remains, not the least hesitation. The question and the answer come together. Then it ends right there; it goes out at the knowing, like fire falling into water.

[22:47] We no longer grab, because from the start the mind takes nothing up. We catch it in time, faster and faster. What the mind creates becomes lighter. Our thoughts become fewer; not that we turn stupid, but the mind is too lazy to think. For whatever it thinks gets extinguished at once. It no longer sits there wandering and spinning as before. The eyes see forms, colours, light, this and that, and the heart can stay still with the knower all the while. The eyes see, but the mind attaches no importance to it. It sees, it knows, but like this: consciousness knows without attaching importance to things. Then nothing comes of it.

[23:30] But if the mind picks those things up and starts to embellish them, then it runs off with them. It dreams along with what it sees: when the others laugh, it laughs along; when they cry, it cries along; when they love, it loves along; when they hate, it hates along. It makes itself an actor in their play. That is how far one can get lost. As soon as we catch it: pull out, pull up, back to the present. That is the remedy, the foremost medicine for the one who practises. If you get nowhere with thinking, do not know which way to turn: come back to the breath. If it will not go on, you are in a dead end, and in the dead end you get no further: come back to the breath.

[24:20] That it will not go on has two causes. First: we are on the wrong path. So back to the beginning. Second: our strength is not enough. So back to the beginning and train anew. Back to the present, supported by the body. Body and mind should rest on each other; do not separate them. Some say you must separate body and mind. But that is just talk. In reality they are together, only they do not stick to each other. They can be together without sticking.

[24:55] Like a fish that stays in the water beside a log. If it stays there, it is safe: no cast net, no hook, no spear catches it. But it does not stick to the log. If it leaves the log, it lands at once in the net, on the hook, in the trap they have set. Whenever we leave the breath, it catches us. Whenever we leave the present: the moment we go out, it hits us.

[25:28] So practise well. Perhaps you have never heard one saying of the Buddha, think it over: "Whoever tastes presence of mind in the body (kāyagatāsati) tastes the deathless (nibbāna)." Just this much: simply being aware of oneself. Do you see? There is no I, no other, no loving, no hating, no right, no wrong, no good, no evil. Do you see? No stupid, no clever. There is only bare knowing.

[26:17] What arises also ceases: arising is the cause (of ceasing). What has arisen changes. It arises so that we look; it persists and changes so that we understand it; and at last it breaks apart. Then the one truth (impermanence) dawns on us, if we look well. So practise: look into your own heart. Walking, standing, coming, going, talking: always keep watch and restrain with presence of mind. Do not let go, do not wander, do not drift, do not indulge, do not lead each other astray, do not roam about a lot admiring the flower gardens.

[26:53] Come and do your own work. The other work, the outer work, we do for the world, just like that. That is not yet our own work. The work we can rely on is the inner work: practice (bhāvanā). It is our refuge. Evil and good (pāpa and puñña) are still fruit of kamma (cause and effect), a burden we have to carry. As long as we still cling, evil and good are fetters. Good leads to new birth, evil leads to new birth just the same.

[27:31] So we must let go: put everything down, put ourselves down. Back to knowing, back to knowing our breath. Stop the chatter, practise. Whichever way it turns out, whatever comes: keep practising. Do not look at each other, do not look down on each other. Look at yourself, not at others. "He is no good": do we know that he is no good? We see him act like that and say he is no good. We merely think he is no good. Good, evil, right, wrong: that is only convention (sammuti). Do not get lost in it. Being good is good, but do not hold on to the good. Carry on step by step.

[28:22] The end of the Rains changes nothing. The basis of practice holds wherever we are. Look at yourself. Where there is work in which we can help, support one another, where an opportunity to give arises, we do it. So selfishness decreases in everything we do: to abandon our selfishness, to abandon our self, our I, to reduce conceit (māna), the showing off with ourselves. "I tell you, I can sit three, four hours." That makes one no better than the others; the great conceit is not abandoned. We reduce conceit, make it smaller: conceit and views (diṭṭhi-māna) are not yet abandoned.

[29:07] So: stay ordinary people, just like that, live modestly and unobtrusively. A fool who does not suffer is better than a clever person who suffers. You need not defeat anyone, compete with anyone, compare yourself with anyone. Look, guard your own heart. Whoever does it can let go. Whoever does not do it cannot let go. Nobody can do this for you.

[29:43] The Rains are over: giving, virtue, mental cultivation (dāna, sīla, bhāvanā), keep practising as before. Do it until death comes. Practise, then you know the way; clear your own path through the thicket. And when the time of dying comes and we have fully accomplished our practice in the present, we need not worry about the future. If the present is right, there is no need to worry about the future. That is what I leave you with for today. It is time. Be blessed.