

Solitude (Viveka)

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 8 February 1990

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. Audio recordings are now available from www.suanmokkh.org and www.bia.or.th. The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok (suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com).

Today we will speak about one very common and ordinary thing which has supreme benefit for realizing Nibbāna. In Thai this is called *kwaam sa-ngat*. In Pāli this is called *viveka*. And in English we can call it ‘solitude.’

The meaning of *viveka* or solitude puts more emphasis on the quality of loneliness or aloneness rather than singleness. Because even if one is just single we don’t know if this will be calm and peaceful. So we emphasize the quality of aloneness.

The meaning of solitude can be used both in ordinary worldly matters, as well as for the highest spiritual purpose. There is a verse that goes something like “Solitude is the resting place for the suffering soul.” And the meaning of this can be applied both on the ordinary level of home and family and work, as well as on the highest spiritual level.

The roots of solitude are very deep. They go so deep as to be apparent in animals. Each animal has times when it needs to be alone. We can see this in all the animals we have around here in Suan Mokkh. And then wild animals in the forest have an even greater need for solitude, to be alone. This is a principle that is very basic. It’s an instinctual need of living things.

Even ordinary people need this solitude. There are times when we want to be just left alone. Even the people we love, we don't want them to come and get involved with us. We just want to be left on our own. Because we feel even on the instinctual level that unless we have some solitude we'll miss out on some very important things. That if we are always caught up and involved with other people, then it will be too troubling, disturbing, too busy for us. So if we look at solitude in these various ways, we'll see that it's one thing that we can't do without. So we should appreciate its importance and value.

In the Pāli language, this word is *viveka*, which comes from the part *veka* which means 'one' or 'single,' and *vi* which means 'utmost' or 'highest.' So *viveka* means utmost singleness, utmost oneness, utmost solitude. Actually the word 'solitude' doesn't quite capture the entire meaning. But utmost or supreme singleness is what we mean by *viveka*.

Viveka can be understood on three primary levels. The first is the physical or material level, regarding our bodies. The second is the mental level, which is mental solitude. And then the third is spiritual or spiritual solitude. We have these three levels for understanding the meaning of *viveka*.

The difference between the three is that when there is nothing disturbing us physically, when there is nothing disturbing the body, this we call 'physical *viveka*,' 'physical solitude.' When none of the hindrances or obstructions of the mind are bothering us or bothering the mind, we call that 'mental solitude.' And when none of the objects of attachment are disturbing our mindfulness and wisdom, then this is what we call 'spiritual solitude.'

When we live in a simple way, then we will have a great deal of physical solitude. In the Pāli language this is called *dhutaṅga* which are certain fundamental practices for living in a very simple uncomplicated way. When we follow *dhutaṅga* practices and keep *sīla* (moral teachings) in a careful relaxed way, then we have a very high degree of physical aloneness where we are physically undisturbed. Because life is uncomplicated, we don't have to worry about things.

If we live plainly, then it is very easy to find physical solitude. But if we live luxuriously, it is very very difficult to find physical solitude.

And for mental solitude, what is called *citta-viveka*. When these various kinds of disturbing moods and thoughts no longer hassle us, then we have mental solitude. There are the five *nīvaraṇa* (hindrances). These are the things that get in the mind's way, that obstruct or prevent the mind from being in its natural, pure and happy state. These are *kāma-chanda* (sensuality or sensuous desire); *byāpāda* (ill-will or aversion); *thīna-middha* which is a dullness, a lazy sloppiness of mind; *uddhacca-kukkucca* which is agitation, a scatteredness of mind; and then *vicikicchā* which is doubt. When all five of these have been abandoned or when they are unable to arise or if just naturally they don't arise, then the mind is said to have solitude. Then there is mental solitude.

We go on to recognize that all five of these are ordinary possessions in daily life. These are things that are coming up throughout our ordinary existence all the time. When life goes in a positive way, then we end up falling into sensuality, into sensual desire. If life goes in a negative way, then the result is aversion, ill will, anger, hatred, where we don't like things and we even want to get rid of them, destroy them, kill them. And when life is just kind of going on and it is not clearly positive or negative, then various forms of confusion and delusion arise. So we end up with dullness of mind or an agitated mind or doubt. These are happening all the time. Maybe not constantly, but over and over again in our ordinary lives. And they prevent us from having the peace and quiet of mental solitude.

If however you are successful in developing *samādhi* – *samādhi* (the collected, calm, clear mind) – if you can develop this through the practice of mindfulness with breathing which you are working on, then these five hindrances will be swept away and the mind will have its very special solitude. So through successful development of *samādhi*, one can easily be free of these five hindrances.

This brings us to *upadhi-viveka* which is solitude on the spiritual level. *Upadhi* means 'burdens.' So to be free of all burdens, when the mind is not burdened or worn down or made heavy by any of the objects of attachment. When the mind is clinging to something, when anything is grabbed on to, then it gets carried around by the mind and this is a burden, an unnecessary heaviness and constrictedness. And there has been no spiritual solitude. But when one lets go of all attachments, then it is like dropping all burdens. And the mind is free of these things and then has spiritual solitude.

To hold on to things and carry them around is called *upādāna* in the Pāli language. This means to carry heavy things, to carry burdens. *Upādāna* we often translate as ‘attachment’ or ‘clinging.’ There are two ways of carrying things. We should understand the difference. The first way is to hold on to things, to carry things stupidly. This is called *upādāna*. It is to carry things in a way that makes them a burden, to make problems for us. However it is possible to hold things, make use of them, or to carry them in a wise way. We can carry them intelligently, with mindfulness and understanding. And then they are not heavy. This is called *samādāna* which has nothing heavy or burdensome about it. So we have these two ways of relating to things. The difference between the two is very important.

There are four basic ways that we turn things into burdens in our ordinary lives. And just as we go about the ordinary business and all that of our lives, there are four basic ways that we are grabbing on to things and carrying them around with us. In fact there are things that we pick up when we are young and carry them with us for the rest of our lives. And we bear these burdens for years, often without ever paying attention to the fact.

The first kind of foolish attachment is to sensuality, especially to sensual pleasures (*kāma*). We’re clinging to sensual pleasures. The second is to opinions, views, ideologies, and beliefs. Clinging to any kind of opinion, ideology or belief, even if it is Buddhism, becomes clinging to views, the second kind. The third is a superstitious kind of grabbing on to things where we hang on to them superstitiously. And the fourth is to attach to things through the egoistic concept of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ These are the four ways of attaching to things. And when we attach, the things become burdens. If we know these four and understand them thoroughly, this will be of tremendous benefit to each of us. Because if we know them, then it is not so difficult to drop them, to be free of them.

When something is positive, it invites us to attach to it in a positive way. When something is negative, it invites us to attach to it in a negative way. Don’t go thinking that negative things don’t have any attachment. In fact we are clinging very strongly to negative things. You can call it ‘de-tachment’ if you want. So if something is positive or negative, they both entice us to attach to them. And then we turn these things into burdens. Thus we say that the positive and the negative,

clinging to either of them, causes life to bite its owner. If there is any clinging to positive or negative, then life bites its owner.

Something positive will stir up a positive kind of ego. Something negative will stir up a negative kind of ego. Either way life bites its owner, either in a positive way or a negative way. Whenever something positive or negative enters the mind, then it leads to *dukkha*, creates conflict, turmoil, torment in the mind. So both positive and negative cause life to bite its owner.

If you are successful at practicing *vipassanā*, the insight aspect of meditation, then you will be able to go beyond this problem. If you can successfully develop *samādhi* so that the mind is very firm, clear, awake and active, then one can practice successfully the insight aspects of mindfulness with breathing. If one is successful in *vipassanā*, the results will be that positive and negative can no longer deceive you. You'll no longer be tricked and made a fool out of positive and negative things.

Ordinarily we think that the positive and negative are opposites. But in this case, as we are speaking of today, there is no real difference. Both the positive and the negative stir up ego in the same way. They are equal in their ability to stir up attachments and *dukkha*. They are basically the same in this way. Ordinarily we may think of them as opposites, but in the way they affect the mind they fundamentally operate in the exact same way. Both positive and negative stir up desire, attachment and lead to *dukkha*.

In our modern world with all the so-called development, it's very easy to see how much humanity is clinging to the positive. Open any magazine or watch a TV program and you see nothing but a lot of clinging to the positive, to consumer goods, to all kinds of beautiful ideas. The so-called 'new age movement' is another development of the same thing, or the tourist industry. All aspects of modern life are very clearly full of clinging to the positive. People are running around chasing after the positive all over the world, especially where there is enough money to create the illusion of getting these things.

We can see that any place, that this doesn't happen by itself, that wherever there is clinging to the positive, there will be an equal amount of clinging to the negative. So you can see the businessmen, the politicians, the ordinary people who

are all caught up in this attachment to positive also have a lot of fear of not getting what they are clinging to or of losing what they are clinging to. So a lot of fear, worry and anger also comes. And so wherever there is clinging to the positive, there will also be clinging to the negative.

To whatever degree humanity attaches to the positive, that's how fast we are going to destroy the world. The more we cling to the positive, the more we are also full of negative kinds of clinging. And together these are destroying the world faster and faster. Any kind of clinging, whether to the positive or the negative, brings suffering. And this is what destroys our world.

All around us the world is full of things with positive and negative qualities which is the world that we live in. When our mind, through wisdom, is no longer caught up in these positive and negative things, then we say that the mind is above or beyond positive and negative. This is our way to survival or to salvation, to be above and beyond this power of positive and negative. This is the meaning of being spiritually alone where nothing positive or negative can disturb the mind. This is what is necessary for our survival.

The positive leads to a positive sort of ego. The negative leads to a negative sort of ego. Either way, there is an ego and when there is an ego the mind gets bit. When there is an ego the mind is not free, is not void. And so it can find no real peace.

Should remember the most important sentence that, "Wherever there is ego, there there is no solitude."

If there is ego in the mind, even if we go and sit in a cave in the mountains or stay at the charnel grounds or deep in the forest, there will be no solitude. No matter where we go, if there is ego in the mind, then there cannot be any lasting or real solitude. But if the mind is void of ego, even if we go and sit in the middle of the theater or stand on a busy street corner, the mind will have solitude.

To get rid of the ego that is in the mind, any ego that arises in the mind, to get rid of it is to experience solitude immediately. One doesn't have to go up in the mountains and live like a hermit or hang around funeral grounds or anything like that. To find real solitude, what one has to do is to drop ego, to toss the ego out of

the mind. And then wherever one is, whatever one is doing, there immediately is *viveka* (solitude or aloneness).

If you are successful in practicing – in developing *samādhi* which leads to *vipassanā* insight through your practice of mindfulness with breathing – if you are successful in this, then the whole world will be a place of solitude and peace for you.

We can look at a few examples of each of these. In the old Pāli scriptures there are listed examples. One can sit here with *samādhi*, if there is genuine *samādhi*, a caravan of a thousand ox carts. And if you have ever seen an ox cart, they have these big heavy wooden wheels and they squeak and rattle and make all kinds of noise. Five hundred of these can pass and if one has *samādhi*, one just sits there and doesn't hear a thing even if they pass right by one. Or there is another example where a lightning bolt crashes down right next to one killing a bunch of buffalos and cattle. And if there is sufficiently deep *samādhi*, one doesn't hear a thing. These are examples of the kind of solitude that can arise from strong *samādhi*, from a mind that is really firmly collected, a very calm mind.

Then in terms of insight (*vipassanā*), once the mind is really stable and clear, and then we can see things as they genuinely are. Then we no longer see things through the illusion of positive and negative. When we see things directly, then we see them as they are. And then the mind gets out of this trap, this illusion of positive and negative. And when the mind can see things in this way, then the positive and the negative have no power over this.

This has a special name in the Pāli language. It's called *atammayatā* which means that nothing at all can do anything to the mind. When nothing can cook up the mind, when nothing can produce results in the mind, when nothing can make the mind be like this or like that. When things have no power over the mind. When the mind is in this state of, which we can call unconcoctability, when the mind has *atammayatā*. Nothing can mess with it, nothing can cook it up. This is the highest meaning of *viveka*, when the mind has this *atammayatā*, this unconcoctability. Then there is perfect solitude. And solitude on this level is a synonym for *Nibbāna* [Pāli] or *Nirvana* [Sanskrit].

Now the Buddha talked about *atammayatā*, both directly and indirectly, in great detail. But although he spent a great deal of time looking into this matter, it hasn't come down to our ordinary vocabulary. When it comes to ordinary people, they never talk about it, they never give any attention to *atammayatā*. So we need to bring this into our everyday vocabulary. We can talk about spiritual equilibrium, unconcoctability, unconditionability. But there are other words which convey the same relative meaning. We need to bring these into our everyday vocabulary, to be talking about these things, paying attention to them in our ordinary lives. We need to get these words into the dictionaries of our various languages.

Now I'm sure that you have all heard of words like 'equilibrium' or 'equanimity.' But you've probably never heard them on the highest level. You've probably never discussed them on the truly spiritual level which is the mind totally free of positive and negative. Lots of people talk about balance but on a relatively low level. One needs to most of all be interested in spiritual equilibrium that is free from and beyond all positive and negative. In this way there is genuine solitude, there is true *viveka*. It is only in this kind of solitude that there is the resting place for suffering souls.

Whether *viveka* or *Nibbāna*, neither of them have anything to do with death. What they mean is that there is no *dukkha*. Ultimately the meaning of both *viveka* and *Nibbāna* is that the mind is totally free from all *dukkha*. So these words don't mean 'death,' they mean a 'coolness,' a 'peacefulness' when the mind isn't troubled or pained by anything. We call this 'quenching,' when the mind is quenched it is not dead. It is just quenched, all the fires are put out.

If you practice mindfulness with breathing diligently and correctly, you'll be more and more successful. And this will lead to four things. You'll get four very valuable things from this practice. The four are – *sati* (mindfulness); *paññā* (intuitive wisdom); *sampajañña* which is wisdom in action, a specifically applied wisdom; *samādhi*, the collected mind which is firm yet active. To practice mindfulness with breathing, these are the natural results of a correct practice. And then these are of tremendous benefit in how we live our lives.

We have this group of four things. The order in which we list them is flexible. It depends on the situation. In some situations we list them in one way, in other situations in other ways. But generally we begin with *sati*. How we list them just

depends on how they need to be used. And in ordinary circumstances it begins with sati. Mindfulness then recollects wisdom, brings wisdom to the situation. That general wisdom that we have developed then is applied to the specific situation, just the wisdom necessary for dealing with this situation. And that is called sampajañña, this special application of wisdom. And then to supply the necessary strength and power there is samādhi. These four things work together in dealing with all the circumstances of our lives. These are developed through a good practice of mindfulness with breathing. And then once we have these four, they will enable us to live life with viveka.

You are able to be mindful of the breathing if you can note and track the breathing through every one of the lessons of mindfulness with breathing. The result will be a mindfulness which is highly developed. The meaning of sati comes from the speed of an arrow. In the old days, the fastest thing around was arrows. They didn't have guns or electricity or anything. But the meaning is something which is incredibly fast. In sati that is properly developed, it is then as fast as the fastest electric current or fast as a laser or whatever. If we develop this, then sati is always fast enough to go to wisdom and bring wisdom to the situation that's confronting us.

In fact we all have sati to begin with. But it is just an ordinary level; there is not enough of it, it's too slow. So we need to develop it so that sati, mindfulness is sufficient and of the highest speed. And then it will be able to serve us in all the experiences of life.

Further, through practicing mindfulness with breathing, one will come to a very deep understanding of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination). Your instructors have explained this to you so that you have an idea what it is about. The more deeply we practice mindfulness with breathing, the more apparent dependent origination will be for us. We'll see more and more clearly how dukkha arises and how dukkha is quenched. And this is the essence of wisdom.

So understanding dependent origination, this is what wisdom is about. And this is what we will be developing. So that then whatever the situation, mindfulness will recollect this wisdom. Mindfulness is like the vehicle of wisdom and it brings wisdom, it transports wisdom, to the situation in front of us. So that we will know how to deal with it in a way that no dukkha will arise.

Next we should look at *sampajañña* (wisdom in action). Wisdom is like medicine in the medicine chest. In our house we have a place where we store all kinds of medicines and things. There is a big variety of them and when one gets sick, one doesn't go and take all the medicine in the chest. One needs to choose the appropriate medicine for our ailment.

So wisdom is like all the medicine in the chest. Mindfulness chooses the right medicine and brings it to the situation, this specific cure for what ails us. This is called *sampajañña*. The specific wisdom which is needed to cope with the situation is what we call *sampajañña*. It is not necessary to bring the whole chest of medicines. Just bring that aspect of wisdom, the application of which will solve the problem.

Another way of seeing this is that wisdom is like an arsenal of all kinds of weapons for dealing with any enemy that attacks us. If an enemy attacks us, we need to defend ourselves, to drive the enemy away and in some cases kill the enemy. And so we have an arsenal of various weapons and depending on the enemy and the way they are attacking, you choose the weapon that is most appropriate. This is another metaphor for *sampajañña*. Wisdom is the arsenal of various weapons. When attacked, mindfulness will choose the proper weapon and the use of that weapon to kill the enemy is called *sampajañña*. But here when we use the word 'enemy,' don't think we are talking about people. We are talking about positive and negative which come to delude us.

So now mindfulness goes and gets wisdom, brings it, and this specific wisdom functions for dealing with the situation. The only question is whether there is enough power, whether the mind has enough strength to deal with the situation and be totally free. This is a question of whether there is enough *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is the mind's energy gathered together and focused, which leads to great stability as well as great strength. If we practice mindfulness with breathing there will be enough *samādhi*. So that if mindfulness brings wisdom and then there is specifically applied wisdom working, if there is not quite enough strength to do the job, more *samādhi* can kick in in order to do the job totally, completely. So this will be developed through practicing *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing).

One should understand that *samādhi* is like weight. Wisdom is like sharpness. If you take some cutting tool like an axe or a knife, you notice that not only must it

be sharp but it must have weight. If you take a razor blade, which is very sharp, and try to cut down a tree, it will take you a very long time because the razor blade has no weight. To cut something you need sharpness but there has to be weight behind it. Wisdom is the sharpness and samādhi provides the weight that provides the work.

One should observe the interconnectedness of these four things. If there is no sati, then any wisdom we have is a waste. No matter how much we have studied or know, how much we have meditated, in real life if there is no mindfulness then all of our understanding is useless. Or if there is no samādhi, we can be very wise but if there is no samādhi, the mind isn't firm and clear. Then wisdom won't have the strength to deal with any problems. And wisdom itself cannot develop without mindfulness, without samādhi. So all of these are interconnected. To function we need all four together. Just to have two or three isn't enough. We must develop all four of them and develop them in a way where they function as a team, as a unit.

And so we ask that when you are over at the center across the road, that you do everything within your ability to practice mindfulness with breathing – diligently, with joy and successfully – so that you can build up, store up, these four things. So that you can develop them, strengthen them – in order that you have more and more of these four. You need to develop them and have them to the degree that we can call your 'life mates.'

In real life we tend to depend on our parents, our lovers, our husbands and wives, our friends, our political leaders, our bosses. But in the end, none of these other people can really save us. They can help us in certain worldly levels but when it comes to the real important issues of life, none of these can really help us. Even our husbands and wives, in the end, cannot really save us.

When we strengthen mindfulness, wisdom, wisdom in action, and samādhi – when these four are sufficiently strong and working as a unit – then these become our life mates, our partners in life, and enable us to be free of all dukkha. And so through them, through developing them, this leads to more and more viveka – until solitude becomes Nibbāna, the perfect freedom, peace and coolness of mind.

We can call them life mates or partners in life if we like. Or we can also call them bodyguards. If you have these four bodyguards, you'll be totally free of all

dangers. There won't be anything that can disturb you or harm you if you have these four bodyguards – mindfulness, wisdom, specifically applied wisdom, and samādhi, the collected, concentrated mind. With these four bodyguards, viveka becomes perfect. Nothing is disturbing the mind. The mind is totally at peace.

When you have these four as your bodyguards, then nothing can bite you. The positive can't bite you, the negative can't bite you. Nothing will be biting. All the things in your life, none of them will bite you. None of them will bite their owners. This is the highest thing there is in life, where nothing is biting its owner, where to live life without life turning on its owner. This is the result of having these four bodyguards.

You can see for yourself that *viveka* (solitude) also means freedom. It means independence. That through *viveka*, the mind is emancipated from all the things that enslave it, all the things that bind it, all the things that harm it. So in *viveka* there is also perfect freedom. When there is total *viveka*, then there is perfect freedom. And this is the perfection of humanity. This is to be a perfected human being or an Arahant, the highest development of human life. So in *viveka*, in solitude, there is freedom.

At our center, your instructors began with explaining to you dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). This is, at least at first, a basic theory or perspective we need in order to meditate correctly. At first we can understand dependent origination theoretically but there isn't much we can do about it. But then through practicing mindfulness with breathing we develop mindfulness, wisdom, applied wisdom and samādhi. So that more and more we can control the flow of dependent origination. And eventually we can master dependent origination so that it only arises if we want it to.

Dependent origination is the condition arising of suffering, of dukkha. And once we can control that flow, then we can prevent the arising of suffering. The arising of dukkha is called 'dependent origination.' The quenching of dukkha is called 'dependent quenching' (*paṭicca-nirodha*). At first we will understand this theoretically. But as we develop mindfulness with breathing, we'll have more and more ability to control the flow of dependent origination and quench dukkha.

One last thing that we need to mention is that it is necessary to repeat all of this over and over again. It is not enough just to walk into a 10-day course and then walk away and forget everything. That won't get us very far. The Buddha pointed out over and over again that it is necessary to just keep going through this, to keep practicing over and over again – so that we go deeper and deeper and deeper, until we are finally successful.

Many of us will just practice a little bit, get a few small results, be satisfied with that, and then drop it. And that won't really lead us very far. So it is necessary to repeat it over and over again, to emphasize things over and over again. So in terms of study, we study and learn about dependent origination. We keep going through it. Each of the various links of dependent origination contact leads to feeling, to desire, to craving. To go through this over and over again, so that we understand it more and more deeply and in more detail. And then in practice, to keep repeating our practice of mindfulness with breathing. All the various lessons, to go through them over and over again until mindfulness, wisdom and samādhi are perfected. Unless we are able to totally eliminate attachment, we need to keep repeating these over and over again – in terms of study, dependent origination; in terms of practice, mindfulness with breathing.

Now when studying and practicing these things, you must do so scientifically. It is not enough just to believe what is being said. Whether because you like to believe things or because it is presented logically or for whatever reason, belief isn't enough. This whole thing has to be approached very scientifically to investigate it thoroughly. So you understand exactly what is meant and intended, and then to practice it. Not with blind faith but with an investigating mind. To practice it until one is totally successful, instead of clinging at minor results. To keep going deeper and deeper until we are completely successful, this scientific approach is necessary. To just believe or accept will not get us very far.

And then from now on you will be able to manage life instead of life managing you. If we really apply ourselves to this, we'll be able to manage our own lives. We'll be able to run our own lives rather than have life run us. So please give it your best and we wish you the highest success in this very important endeavor.

Finally allow us thank you for being very good and patient listeners. And we hope that you are equally as determined and patient in practicing both here and after you leave. So thank you and we wish you the greatest success.

• • • • •

Transcribed by Arthur Brown in Nov.-Dec. 2014
Audio files 5125330208010.mp3 & 1990-02 (1) Solitude.mp3

© Liberation Park, 2016

