

## WHEN THE FLASHBULBS GO OFF

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I have written about beginning meditation a lot in these blogs, and some of you have asked me what comes next? Basic meditation is like breathing. We never get beyond it unless we stop breathing, which is not recommended. In other words, basic meditation is the foundation upon which all other forms of meditation are based. We don't stop doing it. However at some point we begin to augment basic meditation with what is called Insight Meditation or Vipassana. Let's talk about that.

My blog yesterday was about Vipassana Meditation, but apparently it was not clear enough, so I added a long comment to that blog, but it may have been missed so I am upgrading that comment to a full post, and adding something to it as well. Here we go.

Imagine that you and I are out walking late at night in the countryside on a warm summer evening. The sun has almost set and there is no moon, so it is pretty dark. In fact, we can't see much at all. Suddenly there is lightning in the distance. Let's make it heat lightning, so we don't have to run for cover.

In the darkness, when the lightning happens, it lights up the scene so that something can be seen. In the flashes of lightning we begin to make out this or that shape and form. We can see things by the light of the lightning. This is similar to how thoughts light up our mind with awareness. Thoughts illuminate and we can see. We can then think and talk about what we see and have seen.

The image of a light bulb going off in our mind is common. We all know that one. Thoughts that arise in the mind are like the sudden light from a flash bulb. They illuminate. What they illuminate, of course, varies, because they illuminate everything equally. In other words, thoughts are illuminators -- ideas going off. They bring awareness or light -- whatever you want to call it.

What thoughts make us aware of, what they illuminate, as mentioned, totally varies. It could be anything, literally whatever we think or see when we get a moment of illumination or awareness -- a thought. And these ideas or thoughts are going off in our mind all the time like flash bulbs. However, here in the west we have been brought up not to look AT the light, but rather to only look at WHAT the awareness or light of thoughts shine on -- the object of thought, what we see in the illumination. In fact, most of us follow the object of our thoughts, sometimes to great lengths. We even call it our "train of thought." But what about the flashbulb?

However, and this is the point of my earlier blog, we have never learned (or been shown) how to focus on the illumination or awareness aspect (the light bulb) of our thoughts, Instead we focus on the object of the thought, whatever we can see by the

light of that awareness, in other words, what we are aware "of."

As mentioned above, if we want to meditate, we have to learn basic sitting meditation. It is called (in Sanskrit) Shamata Meditation, concentrating on an object, like following the breath, etc. Shamata is the foundation on which Insight Meditation (Vipassana) being discussed here is based.

In Vipassana Meditation (and its big brother Mahamudra Meditation) we don't care what the thought is about – the content. It makes no difference. It could be a good thought, a bad thought, a happy thought, or an "evil" thought.

Instead, in this form of meditation we direct our attention at the light bulb and look directly into the light of the awareness that all thoughts have. Not only do we look into the light (awareness), but we look intently at that awareness until it becomes a window for us to look through the content (object) of the thought into the very nature of the thought itself, and that nature is pure light or awareness, i.e. greater clarity. We forget about the object of thought, the content.

What we see through these "thought windows" is not "something." The "something" would be the object of the thought that we are not following here. Instead, what we see through these thoughts is simply more clearly. In other words, greater clarity itself is what we see. And we rest in that awareness, that clarity. The awareness becomes the object of our attention or awareness. In other words, we become aware of our awareness and rest in that.

Seeing clearly, vividly, and so on is part of what is called Insight Meditation or in Sanskrit Vipassana Meditation. It is something we have to learn and in the beginning (for most people) it has to be gently pointed out to us because our habitual tendency (ingrained habit) is to ignore or look away from the light (Illumination or awareness) and look only at the object of the thought, what the thought means or is about. Yet, the object of any thought is just what happens to have been illuminated by (you got it) the illumination – the awareness itself. Yet, that awareness can be looked at directly. We can allow our mind to rest in that. We can be aware of our own awareness. This is Insight Meditation.

So, our ingrained habit is to ignore the illumination and clarity available to us in favor of following the meaning or train of thought, but like summer lightning, the illuminated thought (awareness) passes and we are soon back in the twilight-zone again. With Vipassana Meditation training, we learn to look into and rest in the clarity of our own awareness. Like the finale at the fireworks, we have light all the time.

By not focusing on the content of thought, we stop recording the endless micro-karma that our current preoccupation with the object/subject of all our thoughts sets in motion.

Your thoughts on this topic please.

