TITLE: Why do you keep losing sense restraint?

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LINK: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdYTDYZv7kw

Q: 0:17

This is the Avijjā Sutta, sutta on ignorance, Anguttara 10.61: "Bhikkus, it is said that no first point of ignorance is evident, before which there was no ignorance and afterwards ignorance came to be." So as you said, quite a lot, ignorance is beginningless - ignorance of what?

Ajahn: 0:51

Well, you can answer in many different ways but the point is, practically speaking, you don't start in a neutral position. You already start begin hindered, obstructed, obsessed, limited, restricted - so that's what ignorance is.

Q: 1:16

Why do you? Why is it that? I mean, yeah, obviously, it's because that's, that's how it is. But why is it so sort of difficult to not see the possibility of not ignoring.

Ajahn: 1:36

Well, because you have no reference point that's not affected by ignorance. So any standpoint you take, but takes an ignorant it's rooted in ignorance, and that's why it's so difficult. So, no standpoint can just suddenly show your situation. There are no markers for it. Any standpoint you take will be ignorant. So top to bottom. So then what do you do? How do you then figure your way out?

Ajahn: 2:08

Well, that's where the gradual training comes in. You figure it out, by upholding certain behaviors - sense restraint, virtue - which in return diminishes, not that you can see it, not at a time, you can see later on, after which your effort would have been verified but initially, you can see, you can make some sense out of it if you're authentic and intelligent and so on, but fundamentally comes down to doing it, regardless of your standpoints. Keeping the precepts, guarding the sense doors, watching your intentions, and so on.

Ajahn: 2:50

And that diminishes that vicious, or weakens that vicious cycle of ignorance feeding more ignorance standpoints feeding more standpoints. And if you stick to those training, precepts, and tame your mind within that, then you get to see your situation from the inside. And that's sotapati basically. And that's what we said in the relay chariot sutta. The views will be purified, not because you figured it all out intellectually and made sense out of it, the views are purified when your behavior is purified with composure is regained within that. Samadhi results, direct result, from nothing else other than sense strength and precepts. Purification of the views is the result of that.

Q: 3:45

But that's not natural, or that's not something that one would...what is natural is to is to want pleasure...

Ajahn: 3:59

Fundamentally, the most natural thing is to put your standpoints first. The craving for the views. That's where the views are the most blameworthy thing, the wrong views, the most blameworthy thing is the Buddha said. So yeah, you would go against that grain against that tendency. Not that you can stop having views, but you can certainly stop emphasizing them. So put your views aside, that you view your behavior, your actions and purified like a skilled Goldsmith who'd be purifying gold, first from coarse impurities then more refined impurities then more refined impurities. And then next thing you know, you don't have those standpoints anymore.

Q: 4:43

You can see what precedes the standpoint

Ajahn: 4:46

You just don't have them anymore, they're gone because they have been unplugged.

Q: 4:50

Because you've you've seen the context or you've been able to...

Ajahn: 4:53

No, because you purified it. You purified into sense restraint, watchfulness of your intentions, general taming of your mind. And then these views have lost their power, the weight - the standpoints, the wrong emphasis has disappeared. So you can have still thoughts and standpoints, but they won't be carrying the same weight, they won't be emphasized because now you know exactly how the mind is stained, how the views are diminished, and how the freedom from suffering is developed - through gradual training, not through the opinions on it, and the opinions that persist will then just be without that weight would be a correct representation of what you did, the right view.

Q: 5:55

So, an arahant can ignore...

Ajahn: 5:59

No, because arahant's mind cannot be untamed anymore, cannot be provoked anymore, cannot be disturbed, cannot be perturbed. Thus: no views, no standpoints, can arise.

Q: 6:13

So the sutta gives ten fuels for the ignorance...

Ajahn: 6:22

So just to clarify before getting into that: so ignorance is not on the level of the views. It's not on the level of "oh, I haven't read enough suttas to figure things out". Its on the level of that self-induced delusion, distraction, greed, aversion through your acts and your choices. That is what ignorance is: choosing to turn a blind eye.

Q: 6:43

That's basically what the sutta says, "Yet, it is evident that there is a specific condition for ignorance. I say that ignorance is fueled by the five hindrances." As you say, it's acting out of...

Ajahn: 7:08

Acting out of pressures, obsessions. The five hindrances, they all boil down to greed, aversion, distraction, one way or the other. So choosing to act out of those things, you are fueling avijja. You're fueling the attitude of ignoring, turning a blind eye of not being clear.

BTT: 7:31

The translation of moha is dellusion. Moha sounds like delusion "More" - your full, kind of thing. But I like the translation of distraction because it's a practical thing - you know, when you're distracting yourself. There's some recognition there. So the most person who's ignorant, is distracted.

Ajahn: 8:00

And he's ignorant, because he keeps himself distracted.

BTT: 8:06

But he doesn't know that he necessarily distracted, he's engaged with the world.

Ajahn: 8:11

Yeah, in the same sense an intoxicated person is not aware that he's drunk.

Q: 8:15

I was just going to bring up the intoxication - like even the way that the Buddha talks about the intoxication of youth, the intoxication of life, and health in the sense that old age, sickness, and death are not things that are hidden from people, things that are very obvious.

Ajahn: 8:36

Nor are they things that will come later, they're already here.

Q: 8:39

And you're already subjected to the possibility of people all around you can fall sick or die, get old. And you could pay more heed to them, but it's like that feeling intoxicated...

Ajahn: 9:00

Intoxication cannot exist on its own, in the same sense. You would sober up if you stopped drinking. The fact that you're not sobering up means because you're still consuming alcohol. In this sense, the fact that you're not sobering up from these intoxications is because you're still consuming things that keep you intoxicated: sensual desire, acting out of aversion, and distraction.

Q: 9:28

It's like the similar principle of trying, basically, forgetfulness, almost right, deliberately induced forgetfulness of the things that are obvious.

Ajahn: 9:42

Yeah, because it's like a coping habit.

Q: 9:45

And it's funny because you only need to try and forget that thing if it's already on some level recognize that it's that it's a problem. Otherwise, you wouldn't need to...

BTT: 10:00

Forgetfulness is a pleasure, a safety, even though you know what you're forgetting about. Just that in a shutting your eyes, covering your head is pleasant.

Q: 10:19

That's the funny thing that if you are saying, even in terms of intoxication, if you're in a situation where you know, you must not forget, you must not become just careless or something - I don't know you're driving or something or whatever - most people at least if you have some degree of carefulness, you wouldn't, you wouldn't you know, if you might drink a small amount of alcohol or something, but if you were to realize, "oh, I'm starting to become intoxicated", it would be seen as dangerous, it would be seen as "Okay, I can't let myself forget this. Because I can see the danger of forgetting." So, in other words, you can only take pleasure in forgetting if you're already intoxicated to some degree.

Ajahn: 11:20

That's exactly the point like, you already start as being intoxicated. So there's no reference point of sobriety.

Q: 11:30

The neutral position is seeing the danger.

Ajahn: 11:32

Well, that's how you work towards a neutral position, then yes, you could still technically become careless but then the danger is much more apparent in doing so. As opposed to somebody who is in the beginning when there's, no reference point for the danger. And also, when I started reading the suttas as a layman, and so obviously, you know, you have all these views and so on. But I remember, you read the suttas and you just seemed almost as if a matter of fact that monks would just get the right view upon going into seclusion - "Oh, that is to Buddha", then they go and dwell, diligent and withdrawn.

Ajahn: 12:12

But that was kind of not quite fitting with the, with the assumption that the right view is on the level of figuring out things and having this magical kind of breakthrough insight type into stuff that just suddenly surprised you. So, what are they diligent about? What are they withdrawn from? So if somebody makes the effort, right view was the necessary result of it, if somebody makes that right effort. And then just he comes, he talks to the Buddha, the Buddha instructs him, he goes, and he dwells, resolute and diligent, and then in no time, and then another one, and then another one, and another one, and then you may think, "Oh, well, because you know, they were lucky, talking to the Buddha" and so on.

Ajahn: 12:55

But no, they were the ones diligent and resolute, so diligent and resolute about what? About spinning their mind constantly around how to figure this out, how to figure this out? Was it rehashing everything? Well, maybe some to some extent, but there is there is probably some more kind of practical unifying thread that all these different monks regardless - one might have arrived through faith, another might have arrived through through discernment, and reasoning, and other might have arrived through composure.

Ajahn: 13:26

Either way. They all simply partake in diligence, and resoluteness of keeping the mind away from unwholesome states and they will arrive with the right view and arahantship. Because you realize, that's where the emphasis is. It's not on a magical breakthrough through sensation, experience of meditation. It's not certainly through scholastic figuring out, you know, the implicit meaning, the hidden meanings of the Pali terms, and it's also not on the level of account of just mere reasoning.

Ajahn: 14:01

You can reason all you want, but as I said many times before, if the mind is not tame through the gradual training in the right order, or withdrawal, and diligence. Again, diligence is not, "I'm diligent, I'm going to walk 20 kilometres and carry 50 litres of water on my back and live on top of mountain and I'm diligent, I'm diligent." Sure, that's one way of being diligent, but that's not the diligence we talk about.

Ajahn: 14:26

Diligence that matters is diligence of recognizing the unwholesome intention, whenever it arises on a day to day basis and simply not acting out of it, enduring it without losing context in regard to it. Every single time, no exception. That's all, that's literally the all that you need to do. And then whether you reason whether you ponder, whether you speculate that will also fall into place.

Q: 15:06

"I say that the five hindrances are fueled by the three kinds of misconduct." So body, speech and mind...

Ajahn: 15:16

Acting out.

Q: 15:22

The three kinds of kinds of misconduct are fueled by a lack of sense restraint, which is basically implicit within...

Ajahn: 15:29

So, why can't I stop acting out? I'm sure everybody at some point is asking themselves that question. Well, here's why: Because you're not restrained, not restrained enough. You're still willingly, consciously in full volition choosing non-sense restraint, when those options present themselves. Sure, maybe not as bad as you used to be or something. But factually, if you still can't help but act out it's because you still have not purified the restraint - the relay chariots.

Q: 16:15

Seeing one's responsibility?

Ajahn: 16:19

Yeah, exactly. Seeing that the direct reason for you still acting out is your choices made on a day to day basis that contradict the sense restraint. So you're still fueling it, and then it burns. You can be surprised all you want, but you're the one pouring the fuel.

Q: 16:57

So I'd say that the lack of sense strength is fueled by a lack of mindfulness and situational awareness. So are you saying this contradiction, you're acting out of...

Ajahn: 17:17

So you lose sense restraint because you lost the context. So how'd you lose the context then? How'd you lose mindfulness? Does that happen accidentally, just like, you blink and it's gone? Or, again, by choosing to repeatedly attend, intend, engage with things that you know, eventually lead to unwholesome? So they might not be bad at its face value, right there obviously bad. But you know, like, Yeah, but this will lead to what he led so many times before. And you ignore that hint, you ignore that sign, that cue.

Ajahn: 17:20

Not guarding the sense doors, basically.

Ajahn: 18:03

And then when it comes to breaking the sense restraint, it's like the most natural decision at the time because the mind is already inclined in that direction, way before. So now you can't stop that momentum.

Q: 18:13

Whereas, if one practices sense restraint, then the possibility of seeing this context of the already arisen nature of experience seeding. Yeah, that is possible...

Ajahn: 18:31

That remains unobstructed.

Q: 18:37

There's always the possibility of seeing.

Ajahn: 18:39

And that's the thing. While the views is still emphasized, a person might be making loads of effort, tremendous amount of effort to keep clarifying that, keep clarifying what's already there arisen before me, not mine, but not actually purifying the sense restraint, withdrawal and not acting out of intentions. So you're still your effort wasted, in a sense. Because your emphasis in the end, not the beginning of it, all of that development. So bring back that, oh, remind myself of the context, but then also continue and ask yourself, why did you lose the context in the first place?

Ajahn: 19:21

Why do you need to keep reminding yourself? Why do you need to keep rehashing things that you understood? Why are they still liable to doubt? Why are you bothered by it? Oh, well, because the taming that precedes it has not been developed, not sufficiently developed. So of course, it's not going to be perfect, it's not like you're suddenly going to stop everything else and you do one-two-three. Sure, technically, theoretically possible.

Ajahn: 19:44

So the mind will still be jumping in the end in the beginning, the middle, and so on. But as long as you now know what comes first is first, you will not get like too carried away say spinning in doubt and trying to figure it out while you know that this is the result, this is the symptom of an underlying problem of insufficient enduring things under eye-level, insufficient restraint.

Ajahn: 20:13

And when I say sufficient restraint does not mean, "okay, so now I will really restrain myself, I will lock myself in a little box, I won't move, I will barely breathe, I will not do anything." That's not sense restraint, that's now self-torture. Sense restraint is when you are moving around freely throughout your day and then you have an intention that's directed towards sense desire, aversion, distraction on the level of the body, speech or mind. And that's which you don't act, that's what you endure.

BTT: 20:49

So let's say that you know that that's what you're supposed to do. You know enough of that, sense indulgence is wrong. It's going to block my progress, everything. So I'm restraint, I keep precepts and then the pressure comes to break those precepts, or break restraint. And all the knowledge you have doesn't work. It's very nice, it's right, it's deep and meaningful, whatever, but it's yet too, too far away. And you break your restraint to whatever degree and you are, and you suffer on account of it.

BTT: 21:48

And then you try again, to build up the restraint, build up the restraint, and listen, you know, hear the same discussion on essential strength, again, and again, and then the pressure builds up. And once again, you with all that knowledge, you break that sense restraint. So, so what, and that's to say that's, that's a person who's just alone, doing the practice themselves. I think that's, you can get stuck in a loop by yourself. So you got all the information about the dangers of sensual indulgence, you're trying to keep sense straight yet, you yourself are breaking it, and then trying again and breaking it, so you just insulate it.

Ajahn: 22:41

But that's the thing. The point is, when it comes to that, when your inspiration and things you know, kind of drifts away into distance and now pressure to break sense restraint is there and you act out of it, well see, the point is that that pressure to break the sense of restraint, does not just magically appeared out of nowhere - does not come overnight. You were just like one moment you were really full-on established in the right context, everything is clear, and the next moment it's "oh, your backtracked out now, all of it is gone suddenly 100 miles away."

Ajahn: 23:17

No, it means there have been things in between that that person was careless about, that that person was negligent, distracted himself with. So he was accumulating [the kind of gradual training in the opposite] Yeah, whatever mind frequently thinks and ponders, that's what it will incline towards, as the suttas would say. So, you might not be thinking core stuff, but there is stuff on the level of distraction in the lens of Oblivion, and so on, that you will repeatedly engaging in even in solitude, and so on, and then the pressure is building up and the clarity is drifting away.

Ajahn: 23:59

So that's what I said before, it's recognizing the little things and the Buddha said that himself like the skillful cook and so on. Before, these, these states of mind come and pressure you where you kind of know, you're going to lose sense restraint to a degree, you start learning and foreseeing the little Telltales [dangers in the slightest fault] So this is not a fault technically, but every single time in the past when I went and was engaging with things of this nature, here and there, I did have sensual lust arise later on, unrelated to this directly, but still related to the acts around it.

Ajahn: 24:43

So and that's when you build it up. So it's not the kind of that pressure that has been accumulated and now it's making you act, that doesn't come out of nowhere. That's the point because you might seem that way, because for the same reason, as we said, when we started this, because you're still emphasizing the end, failing to understand in which you're going through is still the result of other actions that you've been ignoring, cannot be otherwise. Because sometimes you can feel like, "but look, I'm doing everything right and now there is this pressure here." That would be impossible.

Q: 25:21

So in the sutta, there's an analogy, which is perfect for describing what you just said, "it's like when the rain pours down on a mountaintop and the water flows downhill to fill the hollows, the crevices and the creeks. As they become full, they fill up the pools, the pools fill up, the lakes, the lakes fill up the stream, it accumulates, dreams fill up the rivers and as the rivers become full, they fill up the ocean, that's the fuel for the ocean. And that's how it is filled up." In the same way, when the factor of associating with, so these are the factors we didn't come to yet. So when the factor of associating with bad people is fulfilled, it fulfills the factor of listening to an untrue teaching, when the factor of listening to an untrue teaching is fulfilled, it fulfills the factor of a lack of faith.

Ajahn: 26:23

And that's exactly what I've been describing: it doesn't mean untrue teaching from some ridiculously wrong views. No, means simply, the wrong instructions, instruction is not clear enough, not emphasizing the right things. So you will lack faith means basically you will lack ability to emphasize that which doesn't seem natural to emphasize that it doesn't seem the most important or pressing thing to emphasize. You want to emphasize it, you will emphasize what you think you should emphasize.

Ajahn: 26:56

When you come across the teaching, that's actually rightly expounded and tells you well, you should start by emphasizing the views, you should stop emphasizing the end result of it, and start foreseeing how these things occurred, not in terms of psychologizing and just explain to yourself how this happened. But the day when you are deciding to go against the sense restraint or distraction, you start emphasizing that.

Ajahn: 26:56

And as I said, you will have no immediate criteria, that that's the right way to do it because you're pressured on the level of the views, you're pressured to clarify the views, to resolve the views, to attain the views. But you got to put that second and actually emphasize body, speech, and mind actions rooted in greed, aversion, delusion. And, "okay, I've been emphasizing it, but what now, what now? Where is my view? Where is my view?" Well, you have to have faith and keep emphasizing the right order of things, the right development, and then your own pressure or "where are my views and what's happening?" will subside.

Q: 27:56

It's like, I think it relates back to what you were just saying about that pressure: you're trying to be sense restrained, and then pressure builds up at some point, you break the sense restraint, and I'm done, I broke it again. You can kind of think that "oh, because I acted out of it therefore, this danger and problems that I thought I was understanding must not be clear enough, I must think about it more." And that's completely like the wrong...

Ajahn: 28:33

Yeah, you can think about it more but you need to realize that it doesn't matter how much you kind of managed to sort of build-up that inspiration or kind of thinking - it will fade away, it's natural, things come and go. So you still have to then recognize that you really need to start emphasizing that the behavioral aspect of it and things that you won't do. And see the pressure will build up inevitably and then you realize, "okay, I need to act out." But then you still have an option as to what you act out towards. It doesn't need to be sensuality. Like "I need to act out. It's just too much pressure. Yes, I was careless. I still don't know to what extent and how." Okay, well go for a walk. Yes, technically, it's acting out but it's not acting out on the level of fully distracting yourself with sense desires or winding yourself up with ill will and so on.

Ajahn: 29:29

Because those kinds of neutral acting outs or not as unwholesome acting outs won't make you drift too far away, which means then you can recompose better. That's the simile in that sutta when the Buddha said, "like even if a monk having gone to the forest, he's not making any effort, he's just sleeping all day and having sensual thoughts all day long, and just not..." Nevertheless, he's in a more suitable environment, his mind will eventually calm down and compose. Consequently, you have the monk in the middle of the village who is not sleeping who's very diligent, who is not having lustful thoughts, but he's in the unsuitable environment with constant exposure to sight, sound, smell, taste touches, so his mind will lose composure.

Q: 30:12

I think there's also just an aspect as you know, it's not that, I need to kind of clarify these things more so that there will be no pressure to act out. The whole point is that you have to start by not acting out in the face of everything "I must, I must...there is this pressure, but I don't act out of the pressure." So regardless of it, that's how you would actually build up further clarity and that would then make that pressure diminish in the future.

BTT: 30:50

Yes, it's going to the village or the city or as he's traveling around. Yes, these gradual distractions. Yeah. Gradual.

Ajahn: 31:05

Erosions.

BTT: 31:06

It's like a cover up whereas in the forest it's kind of more of the opening, things are a bit more apparent and clearer to you as the person who's there alone.

Ajahn: 31:19

Basically, forest is like a pool that doesn't have anywhere else to spill further, like going on the base of the simile he read. So in the forest, the pool of central thoughts can fill up and pressures and so on, but there is nothing further external that can keep spilling further, and could cause more proliferation and more distraction and more density. So it remains in an environment that kind of is not suitable for that growth. If you remain in that environment, even if the mind is careless, sleepy, so on, lazy, sensual, it will calm down because the environment just has nowhere else to spill.

BTT: 31:59

And it's easier to ignore those little faults when there's lots going on. It's maybe being alone or isolated to certain degree you are, your thoughts are clearer. So those things that you are thinking, doing are clearer to you.

Ajahn: 32:25

Again, now that can become also "I'll never see any person ever again", but you have to recognize that it's all on the basis of where my intentions are and I'm finding the environment that can support like, keeping the clarity in my own choices. These little choices that will then result in building up these these bigger pressures that then I would not be able to help myself and then act out of.

BTT: 32:50

So there's like that clarity, so it's the clarity - you're not clear what you're doing, these little things, you're not clear about the little things that you're doing, where they're leading to. But if you were clear...

Ajahn: 33:04

Well, why are you not clear? Why would a person not be clear? Is that because they haven't read enough suttas, for example?

BTT: 33:10

You're choosing at some...well...

Ajahn: 33:12

which means you are clear, means you know but you're choosing to ignore what you already know. So that's the reason for the lack of clarity - that's my point. I'm not clear, because I just don't know what to do. You already know, deep down, you know exactly what not to do. Especially like, you know, you read few suttas, listened to some talks, it's more than enough to paint a clear picture of what should be done and what shouldn't be done.

Ajahn: 33:38

So yes, the lack of clarity builds up, but not because you simply don't know what you're doing. But because on that smaller, subtler scale, you're actually going against the clarity that you know, you already have. So what you know you shouldn't do, you're doing it and you're ignoring it. And then that builds up and then he comes to the point of "but you obviously know you shouldn't do" means nothing, you still do it, because you built it up so far. The pools have filled up so now you can just magically unplug it there.

BTT: 34:08

So say someone's doing that, constantly - that's the habit of restraining, and then gradually slipping, slipping, concealing, knowing that doing something wrong, but yeah, knowingly, kind of. And that's the habit, that's the habit, that's the habit.

Ajahn: 34:33

So what's the first step to break out of that habit?

BTT: 34:35

Yeah, what's what will throw a spanner in that in that kind of thing?

Ajahn: 34:38

What would throw a spanner in that kind of thing?

BTT: 34:41

Because I know, yeah, it is. It's clear to me though...

Ajahn: 34:44

So it's clear that it's wrong, you feel ashamed afterwards, you know, you shouldn't have done it. Then you don't do it for a while, but then the carelessness, the distraction, that builds up the lack of clarity, and then you do do it again. And then same cycle, and then same cycle, and then same cycle. What's the first step to break that cycle? What is the growth in the discipline of a noble one?

Q: 35:24

Recognizing that the state of an offense is an offense?

Ajahn: 35:29

Well, recognizing is not enough, this person recognizes it every time. But then slips away and recognition drifts away. So what's the act? That's, that's that's the spanner in the works?

Q: 35:42

Revealing it.

Ajahn: 35:43

Exactly, yeah. Bringing it out to the light confessing it to somebody else so you feel that shame, you feel that weight, you feel that disgust even, but its out, you can't hide it anymore. That last layer of "this is just in here", it's gone now. And that's already the practice, that's already a way of addressing it.

BTT: 36:10

So like any addiction, most people who are addicts, they have to first say it, but it doesn't just help saying it internally. And then "I know heroin is wrong", and now they give it up, they always have to ask or speak to others say it out loud in a group. Keep repeating it in themselves, "I'm an alcoholic. My name is such and such."

Q: 36:40

It also helps with like, you might sort of feel to some you might feel ashamed of yourself when you do these things, but if you really say it to somebody else, it comes (out of your hands). Absolutely. It really forces you to, it helps to take up responsibility for it as well because now "okay, it's not only me, who knows about this, other people do as well."

BTT: 37:12

It's like one thing, as monastics we will have that. That's the protocol, you break a rule you confess it, but as a layperson, just keeping five precepts by themselves outside - that can be a big obstacle, I reckon. Because who're goint to confess to? Yourself?

Ajahn: 37:38

So somebody who wants to train their mind and knows right is right and wrong is wrong and what they shouldn't be doing and then they keep losing the context going back to it building up, then you say it, you say it publicly, to group to a monk to two monks to five monks, because it's like "yeah, this is why I'm and that's not going to feel pleasant." And that can be more than enough to bring you back into shape. That's like it's the growth in the practice.