

# The Voice I Finally Heard: Listening Within

• **Dr. Rudra Aryal**  
Professor of Physics



In my childhood, I often saw my father sitting quietly in the corner of our house with his eyes closed. I used to laugh and wonder why he was doing that. For me, as a child, closing my eyes meant sleeping or resting. He would sit like that for about an hour, then slowly open his eyes, look around, and stand up with a gentle smile. At that time, it felt unusual, but now I realize those moments stayed with me as my first silent introduction to meditation.

When I asked him why he sat there with his eyes closed, he simply said, “It gives me peace of mind and happiness within me.” Peace of mind and happiness, those words were far beyond what I could understand as a child. For me, happiness was simple. If someone gave me a chocolate, that was enough. Still, he would gently tell me, “Close your eyes and observe yourself.” I did not understand what he meant. I kept wondering how I could observe myself just by closing my eyes.

Every evening, after dinner, he told me many stories about religion, meditation, and Nepali folktales. He was a wonderful storyteller, and I

always enjoyed listening to him. We would sit outside our house on a long porch-like platform made of clay and stone, called a pidhi. That small house, with its thatched roof, red and white clay coating, and black-painted wooden pillars, was simple but beautiful. On the second floor, there were shelves filled with books. He always asked me to pick one, and then he would begin telling a story from it, often in the soft light of a kerosene lamp. I remember there were a variety of books, some of which were about Gautama Buddha. I did not fully understand his explanation, but I listened to him carefully.

When I was about nine years old, my parents took me to Lumbini, about a five-hour bus ride from our home in Palpa. That journey is still very clear in my memory. We traveled from Tansen to Butwal in an old bus with broken windows. Sometimes the driver would stop by the roadside and pour cold water on the engine. I could see steam rising, but I did not understand why. Now I know it was to cool the engine. We reached Butwal in the afternoon on a summer day, and from there we

got into a small vehicle for Lumbini. It was already full, but the driver said he could adjust us and we got in the vehicle. It was tight, but we fit there. It was a very hot summer day. There was no air conditioning in the vehicle, and even with the windows open, the air was hot. Inside, it smelled like fuel. Everyone was sweating and fanning themselves with their hands. I felt very uncomfortable and almost started crying.

At that moment, I remembered my father's words. I closed my eyes and began to observe my breathing. I had heard this advice for years, but this was the first time I truly tried it. Slowly, I felt a little calm. At the same time, I felt excited. I was going to see the birthplace of Buddha. That excitement gave me strength. When we reached Lumbini, everything I experienced was different. I was so excited to reach such an important place, not only in Nepal but around the world. I felt the air cooler, and the place was peaceful. I saw people from many countries, quietly observing the surroundings. My father showed me the Maya Devi Temple and said that this was where Queen Maya Devi gave birth to Buddha. I became emotional standing there. He pointed to the exact birthplace of Buddha. He also showed me the Ashoka Pillar and explained that Emperor Ashoka built it long ago as a sign of his devotion to Buddha. I had never seen such an old place, more than

two thousand years old. Even today, when I remember that moment, I feel a quiet vibration within.

From that visit and from the stories I heard at home, something slowly began to grow inside me. In college, I started reading more about Buddha's teachings as a self-study. I read about suffering, peace, and the nature of life. Over time, one simple idea stayed with me: our suffering, our desires, and even our happiness come from within. My life was busy with college work, exams, job searches, and the search for an opportunity to study abroad for my higher studies. I focused on my education and career and, years later, eventually settled in America. I never practiced meditation deeply those days. I understood many ideas intellectually, but I could not experience them within myself as I did not practice meditation.

There was always a quiet unrest inside me. Living between America and Nepal, my heart often felt divided between two places- my motherland, where I had a deep connection to the soil, mountains, rivers, people, and culture, and America, my new home with my family. I did not fully understand what I was searching for within myself. Then, a few years ago, I lost both of my parents at different times. Being so far away, I could not reach them or hold them before their final moments. Later, I traveled to Nepal for their funeral. That journey was not

just physical; it was deeply emotional. Over time I started to reflect on my life in a different way.

With that pain in my heart, I started searching for a meditation place near my home. Although I knew that meditation is not meant to heal something but to observe yourself within, I also knew that when we feel deep pain, we begin to look for different paths. I found the Thai Jetavana Temple Forest Monastery in Peterborough. One evening, I joined a meditation session. About 15 to 20 people were there, along with a few monks. It was cold outside, but in the hall I felt calm and practiced for one hour. I was surprised that I could stay silent and sit for one hour without changing my posture. It reminded me of my father sitting quietly in the corner of our house. I stayed at the monastery for five days, reading and attending early morning one-hour sessions at 5 a.m. and 7 a.m., along with about two hours of service each day, such as cleaning, lawn mowing, and painting.

Then I continued practicing on my own at home. Slowly, I came to understand ideas like mindfulness, letting go, and non-attachment, not just as concepts, but as real experiences. After starting my own meditation practice at home and attending a nearby meditation center, I decided to attend a ten-day silent Vipassana retreat in Massachusetts. There were no conversations, no

phones, no books, only silence and observation. Each day began early in the morning. We sat for long hours, first observing the breath, then observing bodily sensations.

It was not easy for me in the first few days. My body hurt, my mind resisted, and old memories came back, with many past griefs surfacing again. But something slowly changed. I learned to see that pain and suffering are not the same. Pain is natural, but suffering grows when you resist or hold on; it is better to let things come and go. One teaching stayed deeply with me: everything that arises will pass away, and nothing stays permanent.

Through all these experiences, from my father's quiet guidance, my childhood visit to Lumbini, my life journey from my motherland Nepal to the New country of the Americas, and my meditation practices, I came to trust one simple truth: Be kind. Stay calm. Understand yourself. When we begin to understand our own mind, we begin to understand life. And when we understand life, something within us becomes peaceful and heads towards liberation from suffering. That is the voice I finally heard in my life, not outside, but within, and I am keeping on practicing to understand it deeply.

*(Dr. Rudra Aryal is Professor of Physics at Franklin Pierce University, New Hampshire, Rindge, United State of America.)*