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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

Summary - Giving Up and Growing Up

This article guides the reader through a discussion on the Buddha's teachings on renunciation - the third of the ten perfection's or paramis - and its result - the cultivation of caga or emotional maturity, and the blessings gained in coming to see the problem with relying on worldly happiness. It discusses the practise of letting go, of attachment to lesser happiness's and the suffering and fears which come with them, and of the determination and courage needed to be free not only from all forms of suffering, but critically from the causes. It looks at renunciations opposite - attachment, and how desire binds us to the unrelenting cycle of rebirths. To enter the practice of renunciation in daily life the article provides nine antidotes, the last of which is emptiness. The discussion concludes with a description of the four blessings a human can have: the bliss of ownership, of wealth, of debtlessness, and of blamelessness.

Giving Up and Growing Up

We meet a lot of persons with similar problems.

How much is enough? Are you ready to let go?

Suzuki Roshi said, "Renunciation is not giving up the things of the world, but accepting that they go away." 1.

The dictionary definition of "renounce" is "to give up; put aside voluntarily; to repudiate; to disown." "Renunciation" is defined as "relinquishing, abandoning, repudiating."

There are four blessings that a human being can enjoy.

They are: to enjoy material objects, to enjoy the blessings of owning material objects, to be debtless, and to be blameless. 2.

These four blessings are attained only in this order, as each one is a gateway to the next. The end result of cultivating and attaining these four blessings is emotional maturity, in Pali, caga.

In earlier times, the meaning of wealth meant well-being (weal) but it is now generally used in reference to a state of being rich.

Presently, in our society, the main aim for a 'good life' is to accumulate wealth, which is believed to be the solution to all our problems; the easy way out. What drives this aim is greed, in Pali, lobha.

Persons have forgotten that the accumulation of wealth is not for leisure or indulgence, but to sustain financial needs.

In today's consumer-driven economy, one only needs to look at the product advertisements such for beauty products, clothing, toys, and car accessories to see this in action.

Since persons use greed as their driver to accumulate wealthy possessions, there is a loss of morality in their processes of doing so.

In 1900, Andrew Carnegie wrote in 'The Gospel of Wealth' "Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community." 3.

On the topic of economics, Charles Dickens had the following to say in 1849 in 'David Copperfield' "Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds six pence, result misery" 4.

The Buddha encouraged his followers to work hard, that is to work righteously, so not to violate any ethical or religious principles in the process of doing so. They were told to work hard to maintain economic stability, but at the same time, he warned them not to become a slave to the desire of wealth.

The Buddha Dhamma definition of renunciation is wanting to be free from all problems of cyclic existence, not wanting objects that cause more misery. It is not that someone suddenly gets excited, abandons all his belongings and escapes to a cave in the mountains, simply hoping to escape his present problems; these people usually return in a week or two, weak and discouraged.

Renunciation is the determination to be free from not only some form of suffering, but also from its causes. It entails the willingness to give up that suffering and its causes. Thus, it requires great courage. It is not just aiming to get something nice without paying a price.

Lama Thubten Yeshe said:

I want you to understand that renouncing sensory pleasure doesn't mean throwing nice things away. Even if you do, it doesn't mean you have renounced them. Renunciation is a totally inner experience. Renunciation of samsara does not mean you throw samsara away because your body and your nose are samsara. How can you throw your nose away? Your mind and body are samsara--well, at least mine are. So I cannot throw them away. Therefore, renunciation means less craving; it means being more reasonable instead of putting too much psychological pressure on yourself and acting crazy. The phrase 'letting go' often arises. 5.

Samsara means 'round of rebirths' or 'perpetual wandering'.

Renunciation is the third of the 10 Paramis, or Perfections. These Ten Paramis are virtuous mental qualities identified by the Buddha. The development of these qualities is considered a life long task for a Buddha Dhamma practitioner in the process of spiritual and mental development.

The Ten Paramitas or Perfections are:

Energy (in Pali: viriya)

Generosity (in Pali: dana)

Morality (in Pali: sila)

Renunciation (in Pali: nekkhamma)

Wisdom (in Pali: panna)

Patience (in Pali: khanti)

Truthfulness (in Pali: sacca)

Determination (in Pali: aditthana)

Loving-kindness (in Pali: metta)

Equanimity (in Pali: upekkha)

Thanissaro Bhikkhu sees renunciation as being a skill to be developed. He likens it to swapping candy for gold:

Buddhism takes a familiar American principle -- the pursuit of happiness -- and inserts two important qualifiers. The happiness it aims at is true: ultimate, unchanging, and undeceitful. Its pursuit of that happiness is serious, not in a grim sense, but dedicated, disciplined, and willing to make intelligent sacrifices.

What sorts of sacrifices are intelligent? The Buddhist answer to this question resonates with another American principle: an intelligent sacrifice is any in which you gain a greater happiness by letting go of a lesser one, in the same way you'd give up a bag of candy if offered a pound of gold in exchange. In other words, an intelligent sacrifice is like a profitable trade. 6.

But what is the problem with attachment?:

Although attachment may at first appear to be much less destructive than anger and hatred, in terms of being caught up in the uncontrolled process of rebirth it is actually the bigger evil. Attachment to pleasure and ultimately to life itself as our inborn survival instinct is the main type of misunderstanding that holds us prisoner in samsara.

Here is an example to illustrate attachment:

In the South of India, people used to catch monkeys in a very special way. Actually they let monkeys catch themselves. What they did was to cut a small hole in a coconut, just large enough for a monkey to put its hand in. Next, you fix the coconut to a tree, and insert a sweet. The monkey smells the sweet, squeezes its hand into the coconut, grabs the sweet and ... finds that the fist does not fit through the hole. Now the trick is, that the last thing the monkey will think of is to let go of the sweet; and it holds itself prisoner. Nothing could be easier for a human being who comes and catches it.

The Buddha compared desires to being in debt. If you owe money to the bank for your house, every month you have to pay. In the end, you will own the house. With sensual desires however, you cannot pay off the debt; they arise again and again. Hunger, thirst, lust for sex, warmth, coolness, they all come back again and again. Trying to fulfil our desires is like carrying water to the sea; a never-ending task and ultimately completely useless. 7.

Ajahn Sumedho writes in 'Teachings of a Buddhist Monk':

Desire can be compared to fire. If we grasp fire, what happens? Does it lead to happiness? If we say: "Oh, look at that beautiful fire! Look at the beautiful colours! I love red and orange; they're my favourite colours," and then grasp it, we would find a certain amount of suffering entering the body. And then if we were to contemplate the cause of that suffering we would discover it was the result of having grasped that fire. On that information, we would, hopefully, then let the fire go. Once we let fire go then we know that it is something not to be attached to.

This does not mean we have to hate it, or put it out. We can enjoy fire, can't we? It's nice having a fire, it keeps the room warm, but we do not have to burn ourselves in it. 8.

It can be a sobering experience when one deeply reflects in meditation on what we normally describe as pleasure. The Buddha said that relative to the blissful experience of release of cyclic existence, everything within cyclic existence is suffering.

Can this make sense?

Take a few moments to reflect on the following thoughts, while taking a pleasurable experience in mind:

- In how far is this "pleasure" simply an escape or a temporary forgetting of daily problems? - How nice would it be if I kept doing this without interruption for a few days? - How fulfilled do I feel by this experience after 5 minutes, 5 hours, 5 days? - To achieve the same great feeling as the first time, do I need more of the same the next time?

The Buddha concluded that putting our energy into grasping for temporary pleasures is not only useless; it creates many problems, and also karmic actions that are better avoided.

This is exactly what sentient beings do all the time; they hold themselves prisoner through their attachment to temporary pleasures, and life itself.

Let me tell you about the middle path. Dressing in rough and dirty garments, letting your hair grow matted, abstaining from eating any meat or fish, does not cleanse the one who is deluded. Mortifying the

flesh through excessive hardship does not lead to a triumph over the senses.

All self-inflicted suffering is useless as long as the feeling of self is dominant. You should lose your involvement with yourself and then eat and drink naturally, according to the needs of your body. Attachment to your appetites - whether you deprive or indulge them - can lead to slavery, but satisfying the needs of daily life is not wrong. Indeed, to keep a body in good health is a duty, for otherwise the mind will not stay strong and clear. (from Discourses II). 9.

Renunciation is closely linked to the first noble truth.

As Nonin Chowaney from the Nebraska Zen Centre said:

Essentially suffering is fear. Even when we are enjoying something, experiencing pleasure or happiness, we are filled with fear because when we possess or enjoy something pleasurable, we fear losing it. If we have a position of wealth, we live in fear of losing it. It doesn't matter how much you have or how little you have, fear is fundamentally the same. If you are the ruler of a country, you fear losing that position, if you are a homeless beggar on the street, you fear losing that position. The fear of suffering, the fear not only of losing what you enjoy, but of encountering what you especially do not enjoy, is the same for a king or for a beggar. So if you clearly understand the pervasiveness of fear, then you understand how the basic nature of samsara is suffering.

If therefore you understand the truth of suffering (the First Noble Truth) and you recognize the presence of suffering, you will have genuine renunciation. This is basically the recognition that wherever you are born, whatever your circumstances are, in samsara, it's basically an experience of suffering. With a genuine understanding of renunciation a genuine understanding of compassion arises. Compassion fundamentally consists of recognizing the suffering of others and as a result generating the intense desire that they be free from that suffering. If you do not see your own suffering and thereby do not recognize the pervasiveness of suffering, it is impossible for you to see or to empathize with the suffering of others. So if you do not have some degree of genuine renunciation, you cannot have a genuine or stable compassion. 10.

The near enemies of Renunciation are not caring about anything or extreme asceticism, and suicidal attitude.

The opposite to Renunciation is attachment to "worldly" happiness; which ultimately leads to misery.

The main qualities of Renunciation are the discovery of what ultimately leads to misery and avoiding that.

So how do you start developing Renunciation? How do you start to let go of attachment to so many things in life that bring unhappiness.

The following antidotes can be applied throughout daily life, but are profound meditation exercises as well:

ANTIDOTE 1 - Observe Yourself: Do I exaggerate positive qualities of things I am attached to, are they really worth all my troubles? Is it really worth to work hard for days, weeks or months to have an hour of fun?

ANTIDOTE 2 - Use Your Inner Wisdom: Discover how exaggerated attachment is and how desire works against oneself. Try to be wiser than the monkey and let go of the candy to be free.

ANTIDOTE 3 - Reflect on the Unsatisfactory Nature of Existence. This is also called the First Noble Truth. How much fun is fun really, and how much is it forgetting the pain? Do desires ever stop or is it an endless job to fulfil them?

ANTIDOTE 4 - Reflect on Impermanence. How important is the person or object: everything will end someday, people die, things break.

ANTIDOTE 5 - Reflect on the Problems of Attachment. Lying in the sun is great, but it quickly leads to sunburn. Eating nice food is great, but it leads to indigestion and obesity. Driving around in big cars is great, but how long do I have to work to enjoy this?

ANTIDOTE 6 - Reflect on bodily attraction (lust for sex). Loving someone is great, but what happens when the "honeymoon-days" are over? But what is the body really? What more is it than a skin bag filled with bones, flesh, disgusting organs and fluids?

ANTIDOTE 7 - Reflect on the Results of Attachment. Greed and craving lead to stealing and all kinds of crime, including war. Addiction to alcohol and drugs are simply forms of strong craving; they destroy the addict and the surroundings. Uncontrolled lust leads to sexual abuse. The feeling of greed, craving and lust in oneself can be easily seen as forms of suffering.

ANTIDOTE 8 - Reflect on Death. What are all objects of attachment worth at "the moment of truth", or death?

ANTIDOTE 9 - Emptiness. The ultimate antidote to attachment and all other negative emotions is the realisation of emptiness." 11.

Although attachment to material wealth is an obstruction to escaping from samsara, this does not mean that wealth must be discarded, but that the correct view of material wealth must be developed. After all, it is hard to practice charity if you are poor.

Because Buddha's followers acquired material objects through hard work associated with morality, they had enjoyment of their own material objects. This was so because, they had worked for it in a righteous way, eradicating any greed or attachment.

The Buddha said to the housefather Anathapindika:

In this case a clansman has wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by strength of arm, won by sweat, lawful and lawfully gotten. At the thought: Wealth is mine acquired by energetic striving... lawfully gotten, bliss comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This householder, is called 'the bliss of ownership.'

In accordance, more happiness is attained when one has worked hard and righteously for his own well being, rather than getting deceived by the samsaric mind of greed.

Although greed does not bring about our wholesomeness, it is often accompanied by good feeling. Greed is one of the three roots of unwholesome minds, which are delusion (in Pali: moha), hate (in Pali: dosa) and greed (in Pali: lobha).

Greed is a strong desire for sensuous objects or jhana happiness. It will never give up this intrinsic nature of desiring however much one may possess. Even the whole wealth on earth cannot satisfy the desire of lobha. It is always on the lookout for something new. Thus if one cannot eliminate greed, or attachment, one cannot be truly happy. 12.

The Pali language term for attachment is upadana.

Nearly all beings have substantial attachment to jewels and precious metals. Hence offering such prized possessions with correct motivation and right mindfulness proves to be a difficult practice.

By dropping and cutting our attachment to arising sankharas, we produce minds free of artificial limitations.

We have attachment because of craving to enjoy worldly objects, sights, sounds, tastes, etc. This sense originates through our sense experience or feeling. We have feeling or sense-experience because we have sense object contact (phassa). Our attachment is the desire to prolong the sensation of enjoyment.

Remember that you are being attached firmly by lobha to sense-objects as well as to your possessions. You cannot renounce the world and your worldly possessions including wives and husbands, sons and daughters. So you are caught up by old age, disease and death, life after life.

The antidote to greed (lobha) is alobha, non-attachment to sense-objects and greedlessness. Alobha is opposed to lobha and it can overcome lobha. It is one of the three roots of good.

Dr. Mehm Tin Mon writes in his book 'The Essence of Buddha Abhidhamma':

As water drops run off a lotus leaf without adhering to it, alobha runs off sensuous objects without adhering to them. When one is not attached to one's possessions, one can give away money and things in charity. Here alobha manifests itself in the form of generosity. 13.

Artists are best equipped to appreciate the material nature of matter. An artist who likes to paint horses will visit racetracks again and again, appreciating the ripple of a horse's muscles, the sweat that runs down its flanks, or the flow of the horse's mane in the wind.

The enjoyment of materiality is not biased. The materiality of a corpse is also to be enjoyed.

A man may say, "I like her eyes, but I don't like her nose", or, "I like her nose but I don't like her hair". Such a person has not attained enjoyment of materiality, rupa, but is rather influenced by the karmic like or dislike that he or she has for the material object in question.

The Buddha told a story to illustrate what is not the enjoyment of materiality. A man said to a woman walking towards him "I like your eyes". The woman responded by plucking out her eyes and offering them to the man, suggesting that if he liked her eyes, he could have them. The woman subsequently went to the Buddha, who used his special abilities to rebuild the woman's eyes.

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The Buddha said to Anathapindika:

One with the wealth acquired by energetic saving... lawfully gotten, is a doer of four deeds of merit. If the wealth of anyone be spent without these four deeds of merit, then it is called "wealth that has failed to seize its opportunity, failed to win merit, unfittingly made use of. But if, householder, if the wealth of anyone be spent on these four deeds of merit, then it is called "wealth that has seized its opportunity, turned to merit, and is fittingly made use of. 14.

The verse of the Anguttara-Nikaya, Volume II, Section 61 reads:

I have enjoyed my wealth. Those serving me
And those dependent on me have escaped
From dangers. I have made the best of gifts,
Nay, done the obligations five. The virtuous,
Composed, who live the good life, I've supported.
That aim the which to win householders wise
Should long for wealth, I've won. I've done a deed
Never to be regretted, - pondering thus
A mortal man in Ariyan Dhamma firm
Is praised in this world, then in heaven rejoices. 15.

The four blessings a human can have are explained in the Anguttara-Nikaya, Volume II, (*Anana Sutta : Debtless, AN 4:62*) Section 62:

Now the housefather Anathapindika came to visit the Exalted One...
As he sat at one side the Exalted One said this to the housefather
Anathapindika:

'Housefather, there are these four kinds of bliss to be won by the householder who enjoys the pleasures of sense from time to time and when occasion offers.

What four?

The bliss of ownership (having), the bliss of wealth, the bliss of debtlessness, the bliss of blamelessness. And what, householder, is the bliss of ownership?

In this case a clansman has wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by strength of arm, won by sweat, lawful and lawfully gotten. At the thought: Wealth is mine acquired by energetic striving . . . lawfully gotten, bliss comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This householder, is called "the bliss of ownership."

And what is the bliss of wealth?

In this case, housefather, a clansman by means of wealth acquired by energetic striving . . . both enjoys his wealth and does meritorious deeds therewith. At the thought: By means of wealth acquired . . . I both enjoy my wealth and do meritorious deeds, bliss comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This, housefather, is called "the bliss of wealth".

And what is the bliss of debtlessness?

In this case a clansman owes no debt great or small to anyone. At the thought: I owe no debt, great or small, to anyone, bliss comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This housefather, is called "the bliss of debtlessness".

And what is the bliss of blamelessness?

In this case, housefather, the Ariyan disciple is blessed with blameless action of body, blameless action of speech, blameless action of mind. At the thought: I am blessed with blameless action of body, speech and mind, bliss comes to him, satisfaction comes to him. This is called "the bliss of blamelessness."

Such, householder, are the four kinds of bliss to be won by the householder who enjoys the pleasure of sense from time to time when occasion offers.

Winning the bliss of debtlessness a man may then recall the bliss of really having when he enjoys the bliss of wealth, he sees 'Tis such by wisdom.

When he sees he knows. Thus is he wise indeed in both respects. But these have not one-sixteenth of the bliss (That cometh to a man) of blamelessness." 16.

This teaching on the four blessings that humans can have was explained by Dr. Ananda W.P. Guruge in contemporary language. This was explained in his Keynote Address "Contemporary Challenges and the Pathway to a Peaceful Mind" at the Australasian Buddhist Convention, "Buddhism: Pathway to a Peaceful Mind", 22 June 2002 to 23 June 2003, Melbourne, Victoria Australia. Dr. Guruge said:

When you have wealth, according to the Buddha, you have four types of enjoyment. You have the first enjoyment that you have wealth. We call it *atthisukhan*; 'I have it'. The sense of confidence you get, the sense of feeling that your life is secure.

How many of us approach our senior ages when we will have to retire, when the income dwindles... how many of us lose our peace of mind because of lack of security?

If you have developed the kind of economic base by saving twenty-five percent, investing the fifty percent you will have the joy of possession, have it, then you will have the joy of consumption, using that, sharing that.

You see, when you say "I enjoy my wealth" it does not mean that I go on cruises, that I eat in the most expensive restaurants, or that I wear the most expensive clothing and drive the most expensive car or keep on increasing the size of the television I have in my living room. No, that is not enjoyment of wealth. Enjoyment of wealth is consumption, which is balanced with sharing...

You enjoy your wealth by sharing, you enjoy your wealth by using it for productive purposes, for charity, for being able to be a remover of suffering from other people and acquiring merit, all this is very important when you have money and when you know how to use that money properly.

The third enjoyment that you get from wealth is, I am sure all of you will agree, you will live a life without debt. How many of us can say that we are not indebted?

We have bought our houses on mortgages; our cars and furniture are very often on hire purchase. We are all the time worried about what will happen if I lose my job. What will happen if something happened to me and the family cannot pay the instalments or whatever we have to pay.

This takes away from us an enormous amount of serenity we are looking for in life. Wealth is needed so you will live a life without debt.

The last of the enjoyments that you get by having wealth is that you will not be tempted to do wrong things. You will avoid improper things. You will live a morally good life because the need for making money is not making you to do the wrong things. So not only in one place but in many places the Buddha has said make your present living one in which you don't carry worries, you don't lose your peace of mind, you live a clean life, a well organised life a life with long directed objectives, so that at the end of your life you have nothing to regret. 17.

May you practice generosity this life and in all the ways it can be practiced.

May you develop emotional maturity.

May you live a morally good life one without debt, and where you are able to enjoy material objects.

May you cultivate the four blessings to develop emotional maturity.

May you be well and happy.

This article was broadcast on our Buddhist Hour Radio Program in 2003 by the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd.

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