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May You Be Well and Happy

Buddhist Discussion Centre Australia
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Summary

This article explains the three obstacles to becoming a noble person, namely wrong view of self, sceptical doubt, and belief in rites and rituals. These can be eliminated by recognising each moment. The continual practices will build on each experience and ultimately attain Enlightenment.

Sister Ayya Khema of Parappuduwa Nuns Island Dodanduwa, Sri Lanka, visited Melbourne, Victoria during December 1987 to teach Dhamma. Several members of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd attended her talk at the Buddhist Society of Victoria on 16 December 1987. A copy of her book ALL OF US Beset by Birth Decay and Death - Twelve Dhamma Talks on Practice given on PARAPPUDUWA NUNS ISLAND (Printed by Sarvodaya Vishva Lekha 41 Lumbini Mawatha Ratmalana, Sri Lanka 1987 for free distribution) was presented to the centre by Sister Ayya Khema, together with permission to reprint on our Newsletter. The book was printed as a Dhamma Dana by various persons.

Sister's book is recommended for all those who are not certain of the Noble Path taught by Buddha, and have wrong view of self (Pali: sakkaya- ditthi) and belief in rites and rituals (Pali: silabbatta paramasa): in other words; anyone who is not a Stream-winner. Dhamma Talk 12, Path and Fruit (ibid. pp. 89 - 96) is reprinted below.

May everyone connected with this undertaking reap the excellent kamma caused by their gift of Dhamma Dana.

Path and Fruit

To have an ambition seems to be a natural phenomenon in the human make-up. Some people want to be rich, powerful or famous. Some want to be very knowledgeable, to get degrees. Some just want to find a little niche for themselves where they can look out of the window and see the same scenery every day. Some want to find a perfect partner, or as near perfect as possible.

Even when we are not living in the world but in a nunnery, we have ambitions: to become excellent meditators, to be perfectly peaceful, that this life-style should yield results. There's always something to hope for. Why is that? Because it's in the future, never in the present.

Instead of being attentive to what is now, we are hoping for something better to come, maybe tomorrow. Then, when tomorrow arrives, it has to be the next day again; because it still wasn't perfect enough. If we were to change this pattern in our habits and rather become attentive to what is, then we would find something to satisfy us. But when we are looking at that which doesn't exist yet, more perfect, more wonderful, more satisfying, then we can't find anything at all, because we are looking for that which isn't there.

The Buddha spoke about two kinds of people, the ordinary worldling (puthujjana) and the noble person (ariya). Obviously it is a worthwhile ambition to become a noble person, but if we keep looking for it at some future time, then it will escape us. The difference between a noble one and a worldling is the experience of "path and fruit" (magga-phala). The first moment of this supermundane consciousness is termed Stream-entry (Sotapatti), and the person who experiences it is a Stream-winner (Sotapanna).

If we put that into our mind as a goal in the future, it will not come about, because we are not using all our energy and strength to recognize each moment. Only in the recognition of each moment can a path moment occur.

The distinguishing factor between a worldling and a noble one is the elimination of the first three fetters binding us to continuous existence. These three, obstructing the worldling, are: wrong view of self, sceptical doubt and belief in rites and rituals, (sakkayaditthi, vicikiccha and silabbatta-paramasa). Anyone who is not a Stream-winner is chained to these three wrong beliefs and reactions that lead away from freedom into bondage.

Let's take a look at sceptical doubt first. It's that niggling thought in the back of the mind: "There must be an easier way," or "I'm sure I can find happiness somewhere in this wide world" As long as there's doubt that the path of liberation leads out of the world, and the belief is there that satisfaction can be found within the world, there is no chance of noble attainment, because one is looking in the wrong direction.

Within this world with its people and things, animals and possessions, scenery and sense contacts, there is nothing to be found other than that which we already know. If there were more, why isn't it easily discernible, why haven't we found it? It should be quite plain to see. What are we looking for then?

Obviously we are looking for happiness and peace, just like everyone else is doing. Sceptical doubt, that alarmist, says: "I'm sure if I just handled it a little cleverer than I did last time, I'll be happy. There are a few things I haven't tried yet." Maybe we haven't flown our own plane yet, or lived in a cave in the Himalayas or sailed around the world, or written that best-selling novel. All of these are splendid things to do in the world except they are a waste of time and energy.

Sceptical doubt makes itself felt when one isn't quite sure what one's next move should be "Where am I going, what am I to do?" One hasn't found a direction yet. Sceptical doubt is the fetter in the mind when the clarity which comes from a path moment is absent. The consciousness arising at that time removes all doubt because one has experienced the proof oneself. When we bite into the mango, we know its taste.

The wrong view of self is the most dangerous fetter that besets the ordinary person. It contains the deeply imbedded "this is me" notion. Maybe it's not even "my" body, but there is "someone" who is meditating. This "someone" wants to get enlightened, wants to become a Stream-winner, wants to be happy. This wrong view of self is the cause of all problems that could possibly arise.

As long as there's "somebody" there, that person can have problems. When there's nobody there, who could have difficulties? Wrong view of self is the root which generates all subsequent pain, grief and lamentation. With it also come the fears and worries: "Am I going to be alright, happy peaceful, find what I'm looking for, get what I want, be healthy, wealthy and wise?" These worries and fears are well substantiated from one's own past. One hasn't always been healthy, wealthy and wise, nor gotten what one wanted, nor felt wonderful. So there's very good reason to be worried and fearful as long as wrong view of self prevails.

Rites and rituals in themselves are not harmful, only believing them to be part of the path to *Nibbana* is detrimental. They need not even be religious, although we usually think of them like that. Such as offering flowers and incense on a shrine, prostrating or celebrating certain festivals and believing this will accumulate enough merit to go to the *Deva* realms. It's devotion, respect and gratitude to the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) which count. But this belief is not only confined to religious activities. Everybody lives with rites and rituals, even though we may not be aware of them. In human relationships there are certain prescribed ways of acting in respect to one's parents, one's children, one's partners. How one relates in one's job, to friends and strangers, how one wants to be confirmed by others, all is connected to preconceived ideas of what is right and proper in a certain culture and tradition. None of it has any basic truth in it, all is mind-made. The more ideas one has, the less one can see reality. The more one believes in them the harder it is to abandon them. As one imagines oneself to be a certain kind of person, one relates in that way in all situations. It doesn't have to be how we put flowers on a shrine, it can also be how we greet people, if we do it according to a certain stereo-typed ritual and not the way an open heart and mind may dictate.

These three obstructions fall away when a path and fruit moment has been experienced. There's a marked change in such a person, which is - of course - not externally visible. It would be nice to wear a halo and look blissful. But the inner change is firstly that the experience leaves absolutely no doubt what has to be done in this life. The event is totally different from anything previously known, so much so, that it makes one's former life, up to that point, immaterial. Nothing can be found in the past which has fundamental importance. The only significance lies in going ahead with the practice so that this minimal experience of the first path moment can be fortified, resurrected and firmly established in oneself.

The path and fruit moments recur for the Once-returner (Sakadagami), the Non-returner (anagami) and the Enlightened One (Arahant). Each time they

are not only deepened, but can be lengthened. One could compare this to having examinations at the university. If one is going through four years of study to get a certain degree, one has to pass examinations at the end of each year. One has to answer questions each time, based on one's previously absorbed knowledge. But the questions become deeper, more profound and more difficult with each subsequent examination. While they are always concerned with the same subject, they require more depth and profundity of understanding each time until one finally graduates and doesn't have to return to university. It's the same with our spiritual development. Each path moment is based on the previous one and is concerned with the same subject, yet it goes deeper and further. Until one passes one's final test and need not return again.

The path moment doesn't have any thinking or feeling in it. It is not comparable to the meditative absorptions (jhana). Although it is based upon them because only the concentrated mind can enter into a path moment, it does not have the same qualities. The meditative absorptions have - in their initial stages - the ingredients of rapture, happiness and peacefulness. Later on, the mind experiences expansion, nothingness and a change of perception. The path moment does not contain any of these states of mind.

It has a quality of non-being. This is such a relief and changes one's world view so totally that it is quite understandable that the Buddha made such a distinction between a worldling and a Noble One. While the meditative absorptions bring with them a feeling of oneness, of unity, the path moment does not even contain that. The moment of fruition, subsequent to the path moment, is the understood experience and results in a turned-around vision of existence.

The new understanding recognises every thought, every feeling as stress (dukkha). The most elevated thought, the most sublime feeling still has this quality. Only when there is nothing, there is no stress. There is nothing internal or external that contains the quality of total satisfactoriness. Because of such an inner vision, the passion for wanting anything is discarded. All has been seen for what it really is and nothing can give the happiness that arises through the practice of path and its results.

The *Nibbanic* element cannot be truly described as bliss, because bliss has a connotation of exhilaration. We use the word "bliss" for the meditative absorptions, where it includes a sense of excitement. The Nibbanic element does not recognise bliss because all that arises is seen as stress. "The bliss of *Nibbana*" may give one the impression that one may find perfect happiness, but the opposite is true. One finds that there is nothing and therefore no more unhappiness, only peace.

To look for path and fruit will not bring them about, because only moment to moment awareness can do so. This awareness will eventually culminate in real concentration where one can let go of thinking and be totally absorbed. We can drop the meditation subject at that time. We need not push it aside, it falls away of its own accord, and absorption awareness

occurs. If there has to be an ambition in one's life, this is the only worthwhile one. All others will not bring fulfilment.

One doesn't have to force oneself to give up sceptical doubt. What is there to doubt when one has experienced the truth? If one hits oneself with a hammer, one feels pain and cannot doubt it. One knows from one's own experience.

Rites and rituals are brought to an interesting end because the person who has experienced a path moment will under no circumstances indulge in any role-playing: All roles are the ingredients of unreality. One may continue religious rites, because they contain aspects of respect, gratitude and devotion. But there will not be any rituals in how to relate to people or to situations or how to invent stories about oneself because the response is with a spontaneous open heart.

Letting go of the wrong view of self is - of course- the most profound change, causing all other changes. For the Stream-winner the wrong view of self can never intellectually arise again, but feeling-wise it can because the path moment has been so fleeting. It hasn't made the complete impact yet. If it had done so, it would have resulted in Enlightenment. This is possible and is mentioned in the Buddha's discourses as having happened during his lifetime. All four stages of holiness were realized while listening to the Dhamma.

The initial path moment needs to be re-lived, one has to resurrect it over and over again, until the second path moment can arise. It's like repeating what one knows and not forgetting so that one can build upon it.

It is very useful to remind oneself in all waking moments that body, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness are all impermanent and have no core substance, changing from moment to moment: Whether one has had a direct vision of non-self (anatta) or just an understanding of it, either way one has to bring it back into one's mind and re-live it as often as possible. As we continue to do this, ordinary problems arise less and less. If we remain aware of the impermanence of all that exists, our difficulties seem far less important and the view of self subtly changes.

The view we have of ourselves is our worst enemy. Everyone has made up a persona, a mask that one wears and we don't want to see what's behind it. We don't allow anyone else to look either. After having had a path moment, that is no longer possible. But without that experience, if anyone should even try to look behind the mask, fear and rejection come to the fore. The best antidote is to remember again and again, that there's really nobody there, only phenomena, nothing more. Even though the inner vision may not be concrete enough to substantiate such a claim, the affirmation helps to loosen the grasping and clinging and to hang on a little less tightly.

The direction of practice is certainly towards Stream-entry. However, there is nothing to get, there's everything to give up. Unless that is done, the

moment cannot happen, and we will continue to live in the same way we always have. Beset by *dukkha*, subject to praise and blame, loss and gain, fame and ill-fame, happiness and unhappiness. The usual problems - all caused by "self" - will arise again and again. The real change comes when there is a decisive alteration in the way we view ourselves, otherwise the difficulties remain the same because the same identical person is generating them.

Being mindfully aware in and out of meditation is the practice which will bring results. It means doing one thing at a time, attentive to mind and body. When listening to Dhamma, only listen. When sitting in meditation, only attending to the meditation subject. When planting a tree, only planting. No frills, no judgements. That habituates the mind to be in each moment. Only in such a way can a path moment occur. It's not in the distant future, it's possible here and now. There's no reason why an intelligent, healthy, committed person should not be able to attain it with patience and perseverance.

We have heard about disenchantment and dispassion as steps on the path to liberation and freedom. They cannot have meaning and impact unless there is a vision of a totally different reality, one which does not contain the world's manifoldness. When one sits in meditation and starts thinking, that's the temptation of diversification and expansion (*pananca*). The *Nibbana* element is one, not manifold. One could say that it's empty of all that we know. Until that is seen, the world will keep calling, but we need not believe it all. It is a difficult task. So one has to remind oneself often, otherwise one gets caught by temptation. One should not be surprised when one doesn't find happiness; manifoldness, diversification cannot create happiness, only distraction.

Certainly one can experience pleasure from the senses. If one has good karma, there will be many occasions. Good food, beautiful scenery, pleasant people, good music, interesting books, a comfortable home, not too much physical discomfort. But do these bring fulfilment? Since it didn't happen in the past, why should it occur in the future? Path and fruit bring fulfilment because they are empty of phenomena. Emptiness does not change nor does it become unpleasant and it cannot lack peace, since there is nothing to disturb it.

When people hear or read about *Nibbana*, they are apt to say: "How can I want nothing?" When one has seen that everything one can possibly want is meant to fill an inner void and dissatisfaction, then the time has come to want nothing. This goes beyond "not wanting," because one now accepts the reality that there is nothing worthwhile to be had. Not wanting anything will make it possible to experience that there is actually nothing- only peace and quiet.