

Training the Heart in Tranquility and Non-Attachment

If we really investigate and examine our hearts (or minds), we will at some time experience joy, rapture and peace. At other times we will experience feelings of indifference, detachment and separation. If we experience the latter we should not blame the Dharma because the Dharma is the natural state. There are times when our hearts incline towards the Dharma and feelings of bliss and calm arise--feelings of complete contentment. At other times, the Dharma seems far away. Rather than inclining towards it on those occasions, our hearts seem to move away. Accordingly we do not taste the Dharma: there is no calm, bliss, or joy, because the heart is depressed and negative; the Dharma is not there. But if one is skilful one need not fall under the power of this negativity. When the heart is depressed, we can uplift it. If the mind wanders, we can control it and keep it from drifting.

When the heart is contented, one should maintain that contentment. Calm the mind when it is appropriate and uplift the heart when it is appropriate. By not following depression or elation we look after our hearts. This is the natural state; the heart is constant, equanimous and truthful. If one ceases to practice when feeling depressed and only practices when feeling good, one will be without consistency or endurance. Take care and train the heart until it is continuously even and tranquil.

Accordingly our hearts will then more and more incline towards the Dharma; we will not forget the Dharma. If our hearts are close to the Dharma, on hearing it being expounded we will easily understand it, our hearts will become peaceful easily. But if our hearts are far from the Dharma and our practice is not constant, we will become drawn away and even greater confusion will arise. We should train and discipline our hearts. When we realise the heart is confused, we should exert ourselves to practice. With this continuous and earnest exertion we will soon get good results.

Even to practice meditation for a short time will bring good results. To bow and make obeisance, to recite the virtues of the Buddha, and do one's duty are all good and worthy practices, but to listen to and contemplate the Dharma is much higher; to reflect, recollect and to be completely familiar with the Dharma is much, much higher. If one meets with the Dharma and it reaches one's heart, one will have a little peace for a little while; even if it is only for a second it is better than none at all. If this happens often, it is like a flash of lightning in a dark sky. As the flashes increase we begin to know and understand. To practice meditation is like this. When one starts practicing, one's heart becomes more and more peaceful. Eventually it becomes truly calm in the Dharma.

To be fully grounded in the Dharma requires letting go of our moods and establishing ourselves in the Dharmas of freedom, detachment, clarity, letting go, stopping and stillness. Even if this happens for one second only, it is of great worth because we shall experience true peace at last. one will then know for certain that there is true peace and how that peace is different from worldly happiness. The world constantly revolves. It is its nature to do so without stopping. Worldly happiness revolves around with it.

True peace is found only in the Dharma. When we practice meditation and our hearts attain to the Dharma of letting go, or non-attachment to all moods, feelings and emotions. When we do not incline towards or attach to any mood whatsoever, then we will escape the repetitious cycle of birth and death; then we will escape Samsara. We need not be reborn in the turbulent cycle of the world

of birth and death. We can be at peace with it, no longer attached to it. When a meditator is at peace, he has escaped confusion. When he has perfect understanding, he has escaped ignorance. When he is clear and empty, he has escaped agitation. When he has lightness, he has escaped heaviness. Such a meditator knows beyond doubt through direct experience. He goes beyond doubts with regard to the most refined and highest speculations, like 'Is there?', or, 'Isn't there?', and speculations about the future and the past. When such a meditator looks at the world, he sees only 'cause and effect', arising and passing away. And when the world passes away, it vanishes.

The arising and passing away of the world, cause and effect, is birth, or the arising of a condition, its duration and its death. Good and evil, coarse and refined, misfortune and good fortune are the world. When a person commits a good action, he will receive a good result; when he commits an evil action, he will receive an evil result because he is attached to the world of cause and effect. When a person is attached to a cause he will receive an effect, since this is the way of the world --he cannot escape it.

One who remains in the power of the world will never be able to escape it. But one who practices Dharma and knows the world through insight, who is no longer attached to moods and emotions, has purified the heart from all defilements and has entered into Dharma. This one has only 'knowing' remaining--the aware one. Any defilements that used to delude and confuse this person's heart are no longer there. His heart is the heart of one who knows--The Awakened One. This is *nirodha*--the cessation of suffering. The affairs of the world can no longer enter the heart of such a person, where only buoyancy, clarity and emptiness remain--peace. This is Ultimate Truth.

One should let go and not cling to anything. When a meditator is with the Dharma, he knows the Dharma that I have just described. And when he investigates the world that manifests in his heart, he will see for himself that all conditions are unsatisfactory; he will see that to experience the unpleasant, to be separated from the pleasant or not to get what one wants, is the cause of suffering. For those with preferences, suffering is inevitable, since love and hate depend upon each other; when there is one there is the other. If we are no longer attached to anything, love and hate vanish; for these things are of equal value. We do not feel attraction to or aversion for the air around us. We should let go of joy and sorrow, love and hate. Then, whatever conditions manifest in the heart, they will all have the same value—then we will not tremble with fear, become discontented, or react to praise and blame.

It is indeed possible to transcend love and hate, and to detach from excitement, success and failure. None of these conditions will then be weapons that stab at our hearts.

For those with preferences suffering is inevitable.

by the late Venerable Achaan Brahmamuni, Abbot of Wat Borvornives, Bangkok

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