

To Delight in the Path

November 29, 2022

We tend to think of samsara as a place, but it's actually something we do. Literally it means "the wandering-on"—although, as we said this evening, it could mean, "the stumbling-on": people running blindly around, going wherever their desires take them, then reading the fine print afterwards, and then trying a new desire, and then another one and another one, keeping at it. So you even though you think that the path away from samsara'ing is long, just keep remembering that samsara is extremely long, and it doesn't necessarily come to an end.

We have to decide that we've had enough and we want to pull out. This requires work and it requires patience. If we want to get out right away, it's like one of those prison-break movies where they need a very elaborate plan, and all the little pieces of the plan have to be put together very patiently. If they get impatient, they ruin their chances.

You've got to be very, very patient as you practice, which means you need something to sustain you. When the Buddha describes the stages of focusing on the mind as you meditate, the first thing you have to do—once you learn how to observe your mind—is to try to gladden it. And you don't wait until you've been meditating to gladden it. Try to gladden it first by the way you live your daily life—by being generous, being virtuous.

This is one of the reasons why, when the Buddha introduced the four noble truths to laypeople, he would start out with these two topics: taking joy in being generous, taking joy in being virtuous. Or if he was discussing the basis for the acts of merit, acts of goodness, he described three: generosity, virtue, and the development of goodwill.

Learn how to take joy in the fact that you can have goodwill for everybody, because you're aiming at a happiness that's not going to harm anybody, doesn't require anybody be oppressed. You're walking lightly in the world: Take joy in that. Then as you sit down to meditate, you can reflect on that, because you're going to be observing the mind, and the mind is easiest to observe when it's been doing good things—acting on good intentions, trying to develop skillful intentions—in other words, intentions that are not only good, but also lead to good results.

If you've been leading a life where you've been harming other people, it's hard to look at the mind. I was leading a retreat one time, and one afternoon, a person in the retreat just started breaking down, crying. I was new to leading retreats, and there was nobody else who

seemed to be responding to him at all. It was very bizarre. I found out later that this particular person had been a drug dealer, and it suddenly hit him—all the peoples' lives he had ruined in the course of his drug dealing. That kind of mind is hard to watch.

So you learn to take delight in doing good, being generous, helping other people who are generous, being with admirable friends—people who have conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment. These things lift not only the mind, but also the heart.

Remember, we're training both the heart and the mind. In Pali, the word *citta* covers both. So the practice is not just a technique for juggling concepts. You're trying to develop good qualities in the heart, and those good qualities make it easier to gain insight into the workings of the mind.

So when you're trying to sit and meditate, you can reflect on your virtue, you can reflect on your generosity in the past. This is one way of lifting your spirits.

The Buddha also recommends reflecting on the fact that you've been developing the qualities that make a person a deva. You take the list of the qualities of an admirable friend—conviction, virtue, generosity, and discernment—and then you add learning: learning the Dhamma. Those five qualities can make you a deva.

And here is where it's good to learn how to take delight in what you're doing as you get the mind to settle down. See it as a challenge, and you're up for the challenge. See it as a puzzle, an intriguing puzzle that you're trying to figure out. Why is it that the mind wants a sense of pleasure, but then when it gets pleasure, it gets impatient? What is the boredom that gets so overwhelming at times? How do you deal with that so that you don't give in to it, you don't identify with it?

When you learn how not to identify with your thoughts, you learn an important skill, because it's in identifying with our craving that we get pulled on and on and on into this stumbling on. So you give the mind something good to focus on, like the breath.

You can work with the breath. You can do all kinds of things with the breath. Think of the breath coming in the base of the spine, going up the spine, coming in the soles of the feet, coming in the palms of the hands, coming in through the eyes and the ears. Learn how to play with your sensation of the body. Learn how to play with your perceptions about the breath. That's one way of making the meditation entertaining.

The Buddha actually lists six ways of delighting to help you along the path. The first, of course, is to delight in the Dhamma—that there is a teaching that points out the true way. This Dhamma teaches the way to gain total freedom, total liberation, so you're no longer stumbling

on. And that teaching is still alive in the world. So learn how to delight in that fact.

Then the Buddha says you learn how to delight in abandoning and delight in developing. In other words, you delight in abandoning your greed, your lust, your aversion. You see it as a victory in the mind when you're able to pull yourself out of these things.

As for delight in developing, of course, that means delight in developing skillful qualities—things like mindfulness and alertness, based on goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. There are lots of good qualities you can develop in the heart and mind.

Then the Buddha says you try to delight in seclusion—delighting in the fact that you're not being bombarded all the time by other people's opinions, other people's issues, that you can have time for yourself to get to really know yourself. Learn how to delight in that opportunity when it comes.

Finally, you learn how to delight in two aspects of the goal. Of course, you really delight in the goal when you get there, but there can be delight in anticipating, one, that there's a goal that's non-afflictive. You're not afflicting anybody. You're not afflicting yourself, you're not afflicting anybody else, with the happiness you've found. There are so many ways we gain our living in the world, so many ways we look for happiness, that are going to be a burden on other people. The simple fact that we have this human body means that we require food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. A lot of people are put to a lot of trouble to provide all those things. But when we attain the goal, we're totally free from all that.

This is one of the reasons why we have that contemplation of the requisites every day to remind ourselves that we're born here with a big, gaping hole—this body that has so many needs. And we keep coming back. When we can't stay in this body, we try to find another one, then another one. Remember that there are lots of karmic debts that go along with having a body, and you're placing a burden on a lot of people. So you can delight in the fact that the goal, when it comes, is not a burden on anybody. It needs no requisites at that point.

The other aspect of nibbana that the Buddha has you delight in is the fact that it's what he calls non-objectification. It's a technical term. The Pali term for objectification, *papañca*, sometimes is translated as “proliferating thoughts,” but the Buddha doesn't talk about *papañca* in terms of how many thoughts arise. It's the *type* of thoughts that are the problem.

Papañca thoughts are thoughts based on the perception, “I am the thinker.” When you have a thinker, then you're a being, and a being needs to feed. And as beings feed, they get into conflict. That's the point that the Buddha's aiming at when he talks about this way you have of objectifying yourself and others. It always leads to conflict. Whereas in nibbana, there's no

conflict at all. There's no conflict inside you, there's no conflict between you and other people. It's total peace, total harmony.

So you learn how to delight in the path of the practice, and to delight in the goal of the practice, because if you don't delight in these things, you're going to delight in their opposites.

For instance, there are people who would take delight if the Dhamma were not here. In fact, look at many Dhamma teachers nowadays. They seem to hate the Dhamma. They keep wanting to change it. They don't want there to be a true Dhamma, just peoples' opinions. "This is just somebody's opinion about this or these were opinions of the Buddha back then, but back then is different from now, and we need something different." They delight in that, that there's no objective truth about what's skillful and what's not—and that pulls them off the path.

Or people delight in developing their cravings, and they delight in abandoning any sense of shame, any sense of compunction. In other words, they delight in all the wrong things. They delight in being around a lot of people. They delight in getting engaged in conflict, getting engaged in things that oppress other people. These are the things that keep us in the bumbling on, in the worst sort of bumbling on.

So when the path seems long, remember there's a lot to delight in as you're following the path. You're on a good path, and even though you haven't gotten to the end—where you're totally free from placing a burden on others and you're totally free from conflict—still you're heading in that direction, and you can see that the mind gets more and more at peace as you continue in that direction. It gets more reliable.

You can begin to depend on yourself not to do unskillful things, even in really difficult circumstances. That's when you really feel safe. That's the main safety in life—when you know you're not going to do anything harmful. Which means, of course, that the only dangers you have to watch out for are the tendencies the mind still has where it could do something harmful to others, could do something unskillful. But you delight in the fact that there is a path that shows you how to overcome those tendencies.

So learn how to delight in the Dhamma, delight in the path—so that, instead of bumbling on, you get really masterful at following the path. It is a skill to be developed, and it's a good skill. It may demand a lot. It may demand a lot of patience, but as in those prison break movies, when you finally get out, you'll be glad that you went to all those pains—that you were that careful, that patient, that heedful.

So learn how to be glad that you're on this path. As you gladden the mind, it keeps you going. It also helps develop your powers of concentration.

That's the next step. As the Buddha said, when you've worked on gladdening the mind, the next step is to concentrate the mind. And the mind is a lot easier to concentrate when it's been gladdened by good things. When it's concentrated, it can begin to release itself from the things that have been burdening it, things that have been holding it down, restricting it. Because when the mind is concentrated, you can see what's going on inside it. It can learn how to say No to things that you realize have been causing unnecessary stress, unnecessary trouble.

It's in this way that we develop both heart and mind at the same time. We liberate both the heart and the mind at the same time. That's what the practice is all about.

When the Buddha was on his last trip, as he wandered around the last year of his life, that was one of the themes he kept talking about again and again: noble virtue, noble concentration, noble discernment, noble release. It's the release that makes all these other things noble. And always keep in mind that *it is* a possibility.

No matter how long the path may seem, the fact that there is a path related to release is so much better than the world that too many people live in: the world in which they don't see that there's a path to release at all.

So it doesn't matter how long it takes. Learn how to delight in the path that goes there, and that's how you arrive.