

Respect for the Triple Training

July 12, 2021

After the Buddha gained awakening, he reflected that people who live without something or someone to respect live in misery. We see this all around us. People don't respect the laws any more, people don't respect one another, and society's miserable.

But the Buddha reflected further: Was there someone *he* could respect—someone he could bow down to? And he realized there was nobody he could. Because, after all, he was fully awakened. No one else was even nearly there.

Then he decided to respect the Dhamma that he had found, because he recognized that it was bigger than he was. The Dhamma's the truth. It's been true all along. There are Buddhas who come along and discover it, teach it to others. And then eventually others just let it go, and it disappears. Then another Buddha has to come and fight his defilements, fight his ignorance, to find the Dhamma, and then fight off the ignorance and defilements of other people to teach them. But the Dhamma's always there. It's always true.

So we should think about that: What does it mean to respect the Dhamma? If the Buddha respected the Dhamma, and we respect him, we should have respect all-around. He talks about having respect for the training. There's virtue, concentration, and discernment, and we should realize that these things are above us.

These are the kinds of things we submit to. I know that in Buddhist circles people don't like the word "submit." We're free to choose, right? Well, we are free to choose, but we're free to make a mess of our lives and we're free to straighten ourselves out—to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and not in accordance with our preferences. These are choices we're free to make. It should be pretty obvious what's the wise choice.

So we learn all the ins and outs of the triple training, and try to have respect for them. And it's a way of showing respect for ourselves. After all, the Dhamma's there to teach us how to find true happiness, how to stop creating the mess in our lives that we've been creating, how to stop creating the suffering for ourselves and for other beings that we've been creating. If we could say that the Dhamma had an intention, its intention is more compassionate for us than we often are for ourselves. So we should take it seriously.

For instance, take all the precepts that were laid down by the Buddha: He didn't make them up; he observed from his own experience over many, many eons

that when people break the five precepts, they create trouble for themselves, trouble for other people. When people engage in wrong speech, some of the forms of which don't come under the precept against lying, but they certainly fall outside of the path—harsh speech, divisive speech, idle chatter—they create a lot of trouble all around.

The Buddha was very particular about speech. If you look through the Jātaka tales, you'll see that the Buddha-to-be, as he's portrayed in those tales, will sometimes break the precepts, except for one: He never breaks the precept against lying. This is one of the reasons why he was able to find the truth, because he was very devoted to telling the truth.

If you start lying to yourself, lying to other people, the truth gets harder and harder to find. In fact, of all the precepts, this is the one that he underscored the most. He said, "A person who feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie: There's no evil that person will not do. That person is empty of the qualities of a contemplative."

He raised the issue of not lying the very first thing when he taught his son, Rahula. The practice begins there. Only when that's firmly established are you really ready for the higher levels. If it's not established, it can spoil the higher levels. You can get the mind into concentration but then it gets spoiled. You can try to develop discernment but it gets spoiled. This is one of the reasons that the Forest Tradition is so strict about the precepts, because they are the foundation. And, as with building a house, if the foundation is cracked, the house is not going to stand.

So we start with respect for the precepts. We place them above our desires to do or say or act on intentions as we like. It's because we have that willingness to submit to the Dhamma that we're going to learn it.

This goes on into concentration. As we live with one another and go through the day, we have to remember that concentration is not something you do only when you sit here with your eyes closed or you're on your meditation path. You want to maintain your center as you engage in all of your activities, and you have to be very careful to watch out for the things that will knock you off. Sometimes it's the things other people do or say; more often it's the things you do or say yourself, or think yourself. So, if you find that certain ways of acting shatter your concentration, you've got to step back and say, "Well, maybe I should stop acting in those ways."

Remember the Buddha's image of the man walking with the bowl of oil on his head. He doesn't want to spill a single drop. Ajaan Lee's image is of carrying food

in a dish. You want to make sure you don't trip and spill the food, because then it gets down in the dirt and you can't eat it anymore.

So, have respect for your own concentration; have respect for the concentration of other people. If you have issues with them, try to speak in a way that doesn't shake their concentration more than it has to be shaken. There are ways that you can talk with one another, even when you're critical, and still show respect.

And that's the big issue: showing respect for others even when you're being critical. That makes the difference between whether they'll be willing to listen or not, and it will also have an effect on their concentration, and on your concentration. So, respect the fact that you're living with people who are trying to get their minds under control, and you want to help.

Then there's respect for discernment. This is directly related. When you see that a certain type of behavior muddies the mind, you have to realize: How are you going to gain any discernment when you behave that way and the mind gets muddied? You have to behave in a way allows you to see things clearly.

This relates both to the concentration and to the virtue. If we do things that are open, honest, and aboveboard, then it's easier to remember them. If the mind is still, it's easier to see. This is what we want: We want the discernment that allows us to see into our minds. So, the way we show respect for discernment is to make sure that the causes for discernment are in place.

As for other agendas you may have as you go through the day, look carefully at them. A lot of our agendas have to do with conceit—wanting to be respected by other people, getting upset when they don't respect us—but you have to ask yourself, do you want your ears to be like big sails that are blown around by every little breath of wind? That's what conceit is: You're constantly looking for other people's respect or lack of respect for you. You have to realize: That's their business.

And although we request everybody to respect one another, there will be times when that's not happening. That's when you've got to defend yourself. You do that by taking down your sails. When something comes up, ask yourself: What would be the *wise* way of responding to that, rather than just your old habitual way of responding?

That mindfulness will give you an opportunity for the discernment to arise. Often, it's not the case that we don't know what's skillful; it's just that in the heat of the moment we forget, we push it out of our minds. And that's not showing respect for discernment.

So the training is there. It's been laid out. The Buddha discovered it. It had been lost by people before him, and someday it's going to be lost again, but we've got the path available now. And as we take it on, we benefit.

You have to ask yourself: Are you just going to stick with your old habits—your old ways of doing things? Or are you going to submit your habits to another set of standards, a higher set of standards, a more well-established set of standards?

As the Buddha said, he taught that skillful qualities could be developed, unskillful qualities could be abandoned. If they couldn't be developed and abandoned, he wouldn't have taught. It's because we can change our habits that he went to all the trouble of teaching. So remind yourself: That's what the practice of the Dhamma is for. It's to change your habits, because the habits you've got right now are creating suffering. You're free to continue creating suffering, but *why*, when the opportunity to stop is there?

Sometimes the response to "why" is apathy: You don't care. Or heedlessness: You're not really paying attention. Or laziness: You don't want to be bothered. But you've given in to these three habits for a long time. That's a triple training you don't want to get involved with—you don't want to submit to. You've submitted to it long enough.

By submitting to virtue, the practice of concentration, and the development of discernment, you offer yourself some better opportunities. The opening for those opportunities is here and now. How much longer it will be open, who knows? Take advantage of it while you can.