

Mundane Right View

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When the Buddha taught right view, he taught two levels: mundane and transcendent. Most of us, when we first hear about the Buddha's teachings, learn the transcendent level of right view, which is the four noble truths, about suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. We tend to skip over the mundane level of right view. But that mundane level forms the basis for understanding the transcendent. As with any kind of practice, it's good to make sure the foundation is solid, that you don't go skipping over the what seem to be the unattractive details.

This is a natural human tendency. Back when I was in Rayong in Ajaan Fuang's monastery, we built a *chedi*, a spired monument, and a large Buddha image. In both cases, when we were working on the foundation, hardly anybody came to help. I remember pouring the foundation for the Buddha image. We had six or seven people, and that was it. But by the time we came to finish the very top of the image, we had scores and scores of people fighting over who was going to send buckets of cement up to the top. But if you don't have the people to do the foundation, the top never gets done.

It's the same with the practice. If you're not clear about the foundations, the more advanced stages get murky, distorted, and can falter.

So let's look at the foundation, because it forms the foundation for we're doing right here right now.

The basic principle of mundane right view is the principle of karma, that actions do yield results, and that those results are determined by the quality of the intention behind the action. Skillful intentions lead to pleasant results; unskillful ones lead to unpleasant results.

Ajaan Fuang once said that this is a principle you have to believe in if you're going to practice meditation properly. In other words, we're not sitting here waiting for some sort of spiritual accident to happen, or for some outside force to come in and enlighten us. The success of our meditation is going to depend on our own actions: what we do, how we think, how we focus the mind, how we position our awareness. These are all very important things in the meditation.

When the Buddha starts with the principle of karma, he starts in two very interesting ways. The first is the principle that there are things that are given. In other words, the act of giving is important. It has a special value. He also says that

there are mother and father. In other words, our parents have a special place in our lives, and we owe them a special debt of gratitude.

That's how the Buddha introduces the principle of karma, through generosity and gratitude.

And from that he builds. Those are the two qualities he starts out with. Modern psychologists have discovered that relationships built on generosity and gratitude are much more likely to produce happiness than ones built on a simple exchange or on contracts that say, "You give me this, and I'll give you that." In other words, if you give something, you want to be sure you're going to get something in return. Those kinds of relationships don't produce much happiness at all. Think about it. That's what our whole economy is based on.

In a place like where we are right now, though, there's a different kind of economy. It's based on generosity and gratitude. In other words, you give without charging a price. Of course, you know deep down inside that somehow there's going to be a reward. Sometimes the giving is in and of itself a reward. But you're not making your giving dependent on getting that reward in a particular way, at a particular time, just the way you wanted. You trust the process. And you trust that giving is good for you, in and of itself.

When you bring that attitude to the meditation, it helps an awful lot. Often, especially in the very beginning, there are a lot of hurdles you have to overcome. If you sit here waiting for "When am I going to finally see the results of this?"—or after five minutes, you say, "Where is the peace of mind?"—that kind of attitude doesn't go anywhere in the meditation. But if you're used to giving and being generous, then when you come to sit down and meditate, you take that same generous attitude. You're here to give your time. You're here to give your attention, your powers of observation to this process. You're not going to be too quick to call in all your chips. Give it time.

People who have time are the ones who are really wealthy. When I first went to stay in Rayong, it was a pretty hard place to stay. The monastery was quite poor. I never had so few possessions in my life. Everything I owned could be put in a bag. But I was struck by a different sense, a sense of wealth in terms of the amount of time I had to give to the practice. That's why the monastery here is designed the way it is. We may not have a lot in terms of material things, although here we're a lot better off than a lot of places, but the real wealth here is your time. You've got whole days to practice, not only meditation but also generosity, observing the precepts.

So you take this wealth of time and you give it to the practice, because you realize that the practice is good not only for you but also for the people around

you. It's your gift to them. If you can chip away at some of the greed, anger and delusion in your mind, the people around you are going to benefit a lot.

This practice builds not only on generosity, but also on gratitude. If you open your eyes right now and look around, every material thing you see here is the result of somebody else's generosity—maybe some of it's your own generosity, but it's all the result of people's generosity. It's here so that we can practice. The roofs over us, the walls around us: Those were built by people who gave their time, gave their money, to make this more comfortable for us to practice. The Buddha image up in the altar, that's to inspire us. Nobody designed that altar. It's been put together by this person's act of generosity, that person's act of generosity. Here you are, sitting in the midst of generosity. You're living off other people's generosity. The attitude you develop in response is one of gratitude, so you practice out of gratitude. This has all been done so that you can practice, so doing the practice is one way of repaying that debt.

In the texts, they talk about the motivations for practicing and trying to get rid of the defilements in mind. One of the motivations that the Buddha praises is practicing out of gratitude, so that all the people who've helped support your practice will benefit from it.

So you find that when you practice with this attitude of generosity, this attitude of gratitude, it helps the practice go over a lot of hurdles. It gives you the strength, it gives you the juice you need to keep going.

This is why the mundane level of right view is important for reaching the transcendent level, because it takes a lot of juice to get the mind to a good state of concentration where you can really look at things in terms of four noble truths. In other words, instead of worrying about whether it's me or not me, or whether things really exist out there or don't really exist, you just look at your experience in terms of where there are sufferings, what you're doing to cause the sufferings. Again, it's the principle of action and its result, in that case unskillful action. There's also what you can do to put an end to that suffering, again, through the principle of action: skillful action leading to a happy result, the end of suffering.

But to get there, you have to work at the foundation. You can't just leave a ladder against the air and climb up and hope that it's going to hold your weight. You need a good solid foundation to lean on. And this is where that foundation begins. It begins in these good qualities of mind. Generosity and gratitude are happy-making qualities. You don't have to wait for some faraway future events to gain the rewards. Having a mind that feels generous, having a mind that feels gratitude: Those are spacious mind states here and now. They're good mind states to be in, good to build on, good sources of energy.

So make sure you don't neglect the foundation, because everything else depends on that.