

Hypocrisy

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We once had a young man who came to visit and meditate at Wat Dhammasattit. He was quite critical of the other people at the monastery, how sloppy they were. He made a big deal over how much cleaner he was than everyone else. He would come up and clean Ajaan Fuang's porch, and it looked spic and span, very neat. But one day I happened to go up and clean it, and as I was moving things around, I noticed huge piles of dust under the little rugs we had on the porch. That's what he did with the dust: He literally swept it under the rug. And as time wore on, you began to notice that was the same way he meditated. Everything looked very good from the outside, but there is a lot of stuff that was just swept under the rug. There were big issues in his life that he was not dealing with at all. Finally, when the woman in the kitchen started pointing this out to him, he left in a big huff. That was the last we saw him for several years. And when he came back after Ajaan Fuang's death, he still had the same big issues. In fact, they'd grown bigger.

What this points to is that as a meditator you want to be as transparent as possible to yourself. This is one of the reasons why we get the mind into a good state of concentration, so that it feels secure enough to look into its issues without sweeping them under the rug. When there's the sense of stability, the sense of well-being that comes from concentration, you can start looking at the issues of your life without feeling threatened by them.

It's interesting to notice how much attention the Buddha gives to the little things. This is why we have the Vinaya for the monks—all the rules that, at first glance, seem really obsessive. But they point to an important issue: that if the mind is really well trained, if the mind really is in a solid state of well-being, that fact should be reflected in all of its activities. And one way of catching it is to pay attention to all of its activities, even the little ones. Otherwise, you're falling into the problem of hypocrisy, which seems to plague religious people everywhere. It seems to be the prime sin, or the prime incongruity. People speak in terms of very high principles, very high bits of wisdom, yet when you look at their lives, they're not in line with their wisdom, not in line with their ideals. It's a major failing.

So to avoid that failing, you want to look very carefully at what you do.

This is why, when the Buddha formulated the customs of the noble ones, three out of the four focus on very everyday issues: what you wear, what you eat, where you live. Not only that, but how you approach what you wear and eat, where you

live. In other words, eat just enough to get by. You're content with what you get. You don't exalt yourself or disparage others because you're content with the food or clothing you get, or how you relate to your shelter. That transparency then goes through the rest of your practice.

So don't think of these issues as minor. This is the test for whether you really are living in line with your ideals or not. If you start out by being scrupulous about the little things, it helps further along in the course of the practice. After all, the defilements of the mind are even littler when they first come. If you don't catch them in time, of course, they can grow into huge monsters. You need to develop clear-sightedness and precision in watching how things arise in the mind, so that you can catch them in time. Not only catch them, you also want to see where they come, why they're coming, and what you can do to starve them. That requires very precise discernment, and it can't come from a mind that's used to sweeping things under the rug.

So, as meditators, we should be careful in all areas of our lives, in terms of what we eat—not so much a matter of what we think we need, it's more of *how* we eat, the attitude we have toward eating. Be very honest with yourself. The same with your clothing, the same with your shelter.

As for the fourth tradition of the noble ones, or the fourth custom of the noble ones, that's to delight in abandoning and to delight in developing. This means that if you see anything unskillful in your behavior, you take delight in abandoning it. That's hard. Most of the time, we like to hold on to our cravings and clingings. As for developing good qualities, that's hard, too. And it's hard to delight in it. But it's an attitude you want to develop.

When you do, you begin to realize how much lighter, how much freer the mind is as it lets go of all the things that have been weighing it down. When you begin to see the results of the practice, and the practice turns from simply doing things because you're supposed to be doing them, into actually taking delight in doing them, it's fun to find out: Where are you still holding on to things that you don't have to hold on to? What areas within you still need to be developed? You begin to rise to the challenge.

But again, it's the little things, it's the little movements of the mind you've got to watch out for. So when something questionable comes up in the mind, don't just sweep it under the rug. Look at it. Ask yourself: What is this? And don't take the mind's first answers or excuses as the truth. Question them. After all, we're so used to covering things up. We have a way of admitting and not admitting at the same time the things that are going on in the mind. Either we pretend we don't

see them, or even if we see them, we pretend they're not important. That attitude doesn't help anything at all. It becomes an inner dishonesty and inner hypocrisy.

So as you sit here and meditate, keep careful watch over anything that might pull you away from the breath. Once you notice, drop it immediately. The quicker you are, the more solid your mindfulness will become, the more solid your awareness will become. Your concentration will grow stronger. Just beware of these little things, the mind states that eat away at the concentration. If you're not careful, they eat up the whole thing. So catch them when they're just nibbling at the edges and wipe them out, even as they are small.

Then carry the same attitude into other parts of your life. In this way, your daily life helps the meditation; the meditation helps your daily life as you begin to notice the little areas where you're slovenly or careless. Or you begin to discover that there are really some strong areas of greed or aversion that you haven't been honest with yourself about, that tend to show up around issues of food, clothing, shelter. So look for them. Delight in abandoning the unskillful qualities and in developing the skillful ones, wherever you may find them functioning, so that this becomes a habit in all areas of your life.

That's when you really are living by the customs of the noble ones—and the rewards aren't small. They aren't little tiny things. They're enormous. But as Ajaan Lee once said, big things have to come from little things. You can't go straight to the big things. First you've got to make sure the little unskillful things are out from under the rug and swept away. As for the skillful things, even though they may start out small, work on them. Develop them, so that your little good habits become big good habits. And the big good habits open up to something even bigger.