

This Body, Too

January 11, 2008

The Dhamma textbooks in Thailand say that a funeral is an inauspicious occasion, but that's not a Buddhist concept. The Buddha's attitude toward funerals is that they help develop heedfulness. In that sense, they're auspicious—if you use them in a proper way. There's a phrase in the Maha-Satipatthana Sutta, the meditator who sees a dead body thinks, *Ayampi kho kayo evamdhammo evambhavi evamanatito*: This body, too, has that nature, has that condition, hasn't escaped from that. In other words, whatever state a dead body is going through, your body someday is going to go through as well, if they don't cremate it first.

Now that sounds like a depressing thought, but it's actually meant to remind you of what's really important. It's not this body. There's a passage where the Buddha said, Look at this body, all the stuff that comes flowing out of it, even when it's alive. All the stuff you've got inside. Anyone who would, on the basis of his or her body, exalt self and disparage others: What is that if not blindness? Even before you throw it away, have to put it down. It already has lots of burdens, lots of problems, and in and of itself it is really nothing special at all. What is special about it, is that you can use it if you are wise. That is where heedfulness comes in, because you realize you're not just the body; the most important part of you is the mind.

In what shape is your mind? You can look at the mirror and see how fit your body is, but where are going to see the fitness of your mind if you don't sit down and watch it? How are you going to watch it? First, you bring it to the breath, because you can't watch the mind in the past and you can't watch the mind in the future. You can watch it only here in the present. So you try to stay with the breath; as long as you know you're with the breath, you know you're in the present moment. You can't watch a past breath, you can't watch a future breath, just this breath right here, right now. Then while you're here with the breath, what else do you see? You see the intentions of the mind in the present moment.

This is one area where we tend to be really blind. We learned even back when we were children sometimes to be dishonest with ourselves about what our real intentions were. Greed likes to hide. Anger likes to hide. Delusion likes to hide. We go along with these things. Even though they're there for us to see, we avert our gaze. If these things are the ones that are making the decisions in our lives, we're in really bad shape.

This is why the beginning Dharma lesson is: Before you do something, ask yourself: What are the results going to be? What do you intend to happen as a result of your action? Once you get a clear answer, then ask yourself: Is that going to harm anybody? Is that going to harm yourself? Is it going to harm others? Both? If you see that it's going to cause harm, don't do it. If you don't foresee any harm, go ahead and do it.

While you're doing it, watch to see what actual results are coming up, because it's a basic principle in the Buddha's teachings on actions, that some results come immediately, others come over time. So look for the immediate results. If you see any harm, stop. If you don't see any harm, you can continue. Once you're done, look at the long-term results. If you see that you caused any harm, make up your mind not to do that again. If you don't see any harm, then take joy in the fact you're developing, you're growing in the practice.

This is a basic principle in learning how to manage your life, yet a lot of people say they don't have the time to look at their own actions. They've got too many other things to worry about. That's got everything all mixed up. The world out there says that the important things happening in the world are things that the politicians are doing, the businessman are doing, the movie stars are doing, someplace else, some other time, and we allow ourselves to get deluded by that kind of thinking. But the things that really shape your life are the things you're doing right here, right now. This is why right here, right now and your actions right here, right now, your thoughts, your words, and deeds right here, right now, are the important things in your life. If you don't have time to look at those, what are you going to look at? Who's minding the store?

This is your first responsibility. This is why we develop the mind, so we can watch these things and see really what's going on.

So your top priority in life should be making sure that your mind is in good shape. This is how you look at it. You look at the mind through what its decisions are, what its intentions are in the present. That kind of fitness is the most important fitness. You look after the body, it grows up and get stronger for a while, then it just starts turning around and goes back where it came from. But the state of the mind doesn't have to be that way. It can continue growing and developing all the way along, all the way up to the very end of your life, it can keep on growing. Yom Kaew is a good example. She kept on doing good everyday, everyday, even in the last week of her life, when she began to notice some symptoms, that things were not quite right, but she kept on doing good. She figured that was more important. So the end of her life is something you can take as an example.

Even though the body may grow weak, you do what you can with it. Whatever good you can think of, that's how you get the most use out of it. That's how you keep your priorities straight, because even when you're doing good for other people, the purpose is to train your mind. You're generous so that you can overcome your greed, you observe the precepts so you can be very careful about your actions, very alert to what their consequences are. Meditation, of course, is aimed directly at the mind. The Pali word for meditation, *bhavana*, means to develop good qualities in the mind—things like alertness, concentration, mindfulness, discernment—because these are the things that give you real protection, that provide genuine health. These are things that are really important in life.

So when you can think in this way, that's when your life is on the right track. When you go to a funeral, take that funeral as an opportunity to remind yourself of what's really important. As for this body, *ayampi kbo kayo evamdhammo evambhavi evamanatito*, it's going to be like that body lying right there, some day, and you don't know when. What you *do* know is that you've got the opportunity right now to develop as much goodness as you can in the mind.

So with each breath, do what you can. Make the most of each breath, because you don't know many more breaths you're going to have. This way, the important part of your life, the mind, benefits all the way down the line. So when it throws away the body, puts the body aside, it's still is not left adrift. It's got its resources. It's got its support, in the health and goodness it has developed inside.