

Don't Be a Traitor to Yourself

March 24, 2014

The world is swept away.

It's one of the reasons why we meditate, because someone like the Buddha found that there's something that doesn't get swept away, and it can be attained through human effort.

As we were saying today, when he set out in his quest, he had no guarantee that there would be a deathless happiness. But he felt that he wouldn't be satisfied with anything less. He was motivated by a very strong sense of samvega. You work, work, work to gain pleasures, and then find them taken away. As the Buddha says in a passage devoted to the drawbacks of sensuality, you work really hard and either you don't gain anything—say you're a farmer and you plant your crop and it gets wiped out by forces beyond your control—or you do harvest the crop you want and you gain the profit you want and either it gets stolen or hateful heirs take it away. That's material things.

Then there are relationships. The Buddha compares the happiness that comes from relationships to borrowed goods. If your happiness, your sense of who-you-are depends on someone else, they can take it away at any time. It was seeing this that the Buddha-to-be said there's got to be something better.

Now, we're fortunate that he did find that something better. We of course don't have one hundred percent guarantee that he did until we ourselves have found that within ourselves. But at least there's someone who offers the hope and sets out a path. He gives us the opportunity of testing the path, of seeing if it works.

And fortunately, it doesn't save all of its rewards for the end. There's a lot of good to be gained as you practice: finding a sense of well-being inside where the mind can settle down and have a clear sense of solidity, security—a sense of nourishment that doesn't have to depend on other people, doesn't have to depend on situations outside being just this way or just that way. In other words, we're not depending on borrowed goods here. We're creating goods of our own.

Ajaan Lee has a nice comparison. He says it's as if you have a piece of land here. If you cultivate it, it'll give you all the food you need. But most of us go out and focus on other people's land, hoping to cultivate something from what they've got or what they have to offer. Of course, if you go planting crops in other people's fields, they can just take the crops, claim them as their own, and run off with them.

Think about the city of Ayuddhaya: It was laid siege to, but there wasn't just a city inside the city walls. They had farms, they had fields, they had orchards. As a

result, they were able to withstand the siege for a long, long time. They could have probably withstood longer if it hadn't been for some traitors who opened the gates to the enemy at one point.

That's what we do as we try to look for our happiness outside: We're being traitors to our own best interests.

So it's good to think about these things as you're getting the mind to settle down. It helps develop a sense of samvega. Ajaan Lee has a long, long description of the various topics you can contemplate to get the mind to settle down, and in each case they're aimed at developing samvega.

He lists the breath as the last one in that particular list of concentration topics, advising you that you work with the topics that develop samvega first so that you're chastened, realizing that if you're going to leave the breath, you're looking for trouble, whereas here at the breath is a good place to stay. Learn to appreciate it.

That's what *pasada*, confidence, is for: realizing that not everything in the world is miserable, not everything gets swept away, not everything good is dependent on other people. You've got a good potential here. Here is your land, your own land. Your own breath is completely your breath. No one else can sense it for you, no one else can move in and sense it instead of you. This is your territory. Make the most of it.

The breath is inconstant, but for the time being, you don't focus on that. You focus instead on the fact that you can stay with the breath all the way in, all the way out. After all, it's the inconstancy of the mind that's the real problem. It's with the breath for a bit and then it changes its mind.

Again, it's a traitor to itself. It opens the gates and lets in thoughts of past, future; sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, so that all that business of the world out there can come flooding in.

There's a passage where the Buddha talks about how, when the mind gets into the first jhana, you stand at the edge of the world—which he defines as enticing sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations—and for the time being at least you can be beyond the sway of the world. You've got something better here.

There's a sense of well-being that's called the pleasure of form, i.e., the form of the body as you sense it from within. This is your property; this is your land. Cultivate it. What can you do with these four properties of earth, wind, fire, and water? When is it good to have a good solid heavy sense of concentration and when do you want a lighter sense of concentration? Familiarize yourself with this territory.

This is where you can grow your own crops. No one can take them away from

you. And no one else has to even know that you have them.

That's one of the other dangers of having outside pleasures: Other people can see them. Another one of the Buddha's analogies for sensuality is of a hawk with a piece of meat. Other hawks and vultures and crows see it and they're going to attack the first hawk. They want that meat, too.

The pleasures of relationships, the pleasures that come from having material possessions: They're there for everybody to see. And other people can decide, "Oh, I want that." In that particular analogy, the Buddha says that if the first hawk doesn't let go of the little piece of meat, it's going to be suffering for a long time.

So it's good to learn how to let go of those kinds of things. Focus instead on the good food you can grow.

The Buddha compares the states of jhana to different kinds of food. The best, of course, is the fourth jhana, which he compares to honey and ghee: good, rich food. But all the levels of concentration can be nourishing. You learn how to appreciate them.

Don't go opening the gates, letting other people come in and trample your crops. The people here stand for thoughts of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations outside—which of course includes thoughts of actual people and material objects outside. This is how they all come in. You let them in. Learn how to close off those gates.

Even though the enemy may be laying siege to you all around, as long as you've got all the food and water and shelter you need inside, you're safe.

This may not be the ultimate happiness or the ultimate in terms of what a human being can attain, but it's the path there. In the meantime, you've got the nourishment that comes from developing this state of concentration inside.

So appreciate this. Hang on to it. It's the way out.