

A Leap of the Heart

November 17, 2017

When we read the story of the Buddha's life, all too often it seems that he was superhuman. Engaging in austerities for six years is something we would never even think of doing. It seems as if he was able to give up things as soon as he saw that there would be the least little bit of harm in doing them.

But there are other times when he does seem very human, as in his description of his sense of dismay at seeing the world as a little tiny stream of water with lots of fish fighting one another over that last drop of water, realizing that everything in the world was laid claim to. Everywhere he would look for happiness that he'd like to take for his own, somebody had already laid claim to it or would lay claim to it. The sense of dismay he felt at that point seems very human.

There's another point where someone comes to see Ven. Ananda and says, "This business about the monks giving up sensuality seems hard to imagine." So Ananda takes him to see the Buddha. And the Buddha says, "Even I myself, as I was trying to get the mind into concentration, realizing that to get the mind into concentration I had to give up thoughts of sensuality: My mind just did not leap up at the prospect."

So the Buddha, too, had to struggle with the issue of giving things up, letting go of things, sacrificing things. It's a basic principle that, as he said, if you see that there's a greater happiness that's going to come from letting go of a lesser happiness, you should be willing to let go of that lesser happiness. It's a very basic principle. Makes a lot of sense. But it's not all that easy to do.

As the Buddha said, part of what was required was seeing the drawbacks of what he was holding onto. But that's not all. You can see the drawbacks many, many times and you still don't let go. That's when you have to do a deeper analysis.

The Buddha gives you five things to look for. First, what is the origination of that mental state? Say there's a sexual fantasy or a greedy fantasy or thoughts of anger, thoughts of frustration, thoughts of envy: What sparks them? That's the first thing you want to look for.

All too often, we know these things only when they're full-blown, and they seem to make a lot of sense when they're full-blown. They've taken over that much of the mind, that much of the mind's committee. You want to see them as soon as the first thought comes into one member of the committee. Why does it come?

Sometimes you find that some strange physical sensation in the body kicks in these thoughts. Other times it's when you're tired. Other times it's when

you're frustrated in one area of life, so you compensate by pulling out these fantasies where you're more in control, you have more power. But look for that spark that sets things off and learn to see it as pretty arbitrary. Because these things *are* arbitrary. Something happens in the area where it's not very clear whether it's in the mind or in the body, a feeling of dis-ease, and immediately there's an attempt to compensate. And the ways we compensate often have a lot to do with ways we've compensated before. These can go back, back, back to times when we were pretty stupid, pretty ignorant, but we developed a habit, and the more times you repeat a habit, the more sense it makes.

So learn how to look at this as just something that comes, and when it comes it's going to have a cause. See what the spark is.

Then also look to see how these things pass away. Because it's not the case that they're always there. You can be angry for an hour, but are you really angry for the entire hour or is it just something that comes in bits and spurts? It stops for a bit and then you dig it up again and run with it for a while and then it dies out. You want to see it dying out, so you can begin to realize that it's not as scary as you thought, not as big and monolithic as you thought.

Sometimes thoughts come into the mind and say, "Do this. If you don't, things are just going to get more and more tense inside the body, more and more tense inside the mind, until you can't stand it and you're going to explode, so you might as well give in now." Well, one of the ways of counteracting that belief is to watch these things just coming and going and coming and going. The going is sometimes pretty random. Something else grabs your attention, you totally forget what the original issue was, and you're off running with something else. So you look for that moment of disinterest when those things stop.

Seeing the origination and passing away of these things gives you an insight that's really important: that they are separate from you. If something really were you, you wouldn't see it arise. After all, you'd be arising at the same time. You weren't there beforehand. And to see something pass away, you realize "Oh! It's not me, because if it were really me, I wouldn't have lasted after it stopped."

This insight helps you see something that the Buddha says is really important: If you want to understand things, you have to see them as something separate. Particularly, he says, see these things as aggregates that are something separate. That's a good way of analyzing things, because even though the whole terminology of the aggregates may sound a little foreign sometimes, it's actually very directly related to how we shape thoughts and run with them and drop them.

There's a feeling, say, someplace in the body. Then there's a perception you slap onto it. And once you've slapped the perception onto it, it gives you

something to talk about. And then there's your awareness of all these things. You want to see the awareness as separate from the other activities. And you want to break them down into little activities. That way, the thought is not so monolithic. It's not so overwhelming. You can cut it down to size.

At the same time, you also begin to realize how much effort you're putting into keeping these things going. After all, they're ready to drop away at any moment. But you stir them up again, stir them up again. So realizing the amount of effort you put into that then raises the next question of, "What's the value of that effort? Is it something really worthwhile or not?" Because a very deep function in our brain is the part of the brain that says, "This thing I want to do: Is it worth the effort or not? Will the rewards be worth it or not?" That's what keeps you going back again and again and again.

Often they talk about how you don't understand events going on in the mind unless you trace them all the way back to some event in your childhood. But that's not necessarily the case. Now, tracing it back to an event in your childhood can help you see how arbitrary it was, but if you trace things back in the wrong way, you just say "Well, this is the way I am. I've been this way for a long time. I'm scarred for life so I'm going to continue being scarred." That's not helpful. What you want to see is: Why do you keep on going back to this habit now?

This is where you look for the allure: What's appealing about that kind of thought?

Often the appeal is simply the fact that you're used to it. It's a pattern of thinking that you've been through many, many times. You feel like you're in control because you know where it's going to go. But there are also other ways of finding something unskillful alluring, many of which we're not really honest with ourselves about. We don't like to admit to ourselves that we go for a particular kind of thing because of the kick we get out of it.

But as you've been meditating, you can calmly ask yourself, "What do I look for in this?" And you have to look again and again and again to see what the allure is, especially if it's the kind that you'd rather hide from yourself. But there will come a time when you suddenly see, "Oh. I went for this because I thought 'x.'" The two thoughts appear together. The allure-thought tends to hide very quickly, but if your powers of observation are quick and your alertness is right there, you see this. And when you see how stupid it is and that you don't have to do this, then you let it go.

What's the stupidity? That's the other part of the analysis: seeing the drawbacks. Where does this particular kind of thinking lead? If you were to think it for twenty-four hours, where would it lead you? And does it really provide any nourishment? It takes a lot of energy to think a lot of these things, yet what do you have to show for it? And why are you so enslaved to this?

When you think about those different kinds of happiness, the ones for which you're willing to sacrifice a greater happiness, sometimes you find there's not much, just something little that you like and you're not willing to sacrifice it.

So you have to look at that very carefully to see the drawbacks of that kind of stubbornness of the mind. And there will come a point—although it can't be programmed that you'll analyse this for five times and get the results you want—but there will come a point when you suddenly feel dispassion for the whole thing. In other words, it loses its appeal.

When the Buddha analyses the whole process, he says dispassion is preceded by disenchantment. Now the word *disenchantment* means the state of mind that comes when you've been eating a certain kind of food and you've decided you've had enough, and the idea of eating more of it simply does not appeal at all. This corresponds, of course, to the analysis of clinging, in which the Buddha uses the same word for clinging as they use in Pali for the act of taking sustenance from something. You've been feeding on things, the feeding is suffering, and now you've seen enough so that you don't want anymore. When you want to stop feeding, that's disenchantment. And from there, the dispassion comes in. The dispassion then undercuts any motive for continuing to fabricate whatever you used to take as food.

So this is the process. Look for the origination. Look for the passing away. Look for the allure. Look for the drawbacks. And finally there'll be the escape. All of this is motivated by heedfulness, along with your desire, as Ajaan Mun says, not to come back and be the laughingstock of the defilements. They see you struggling again and again and again to get out of their power. And they laugh at you because they know you're going to come back. But now something inside you says "I don't want to come back again. I've had enough."

A lot of the practice of looking for the drawbacks. In fact, this whole process is one of separating yourself from whatever it was that was unskillful, until you get to the point where you can analyze it either as something you used to identify with and now see it as not-self and you let it go, or you actually see it as somebody else in there. The Buddha talks about Mara being inside. Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about the defilements as if they had a will of their own. And there are ways in which they do.

So do whatever you can to separate yourself from them so that you can see them as something you don't necessarily have to go with and you don't necessarily identify with—and don't want to. This step of stepping back and seeing them as something separate is what gives you a handle on them.

Now, the more you can motivate yourself to do this practice, the more your heart will leap up at the prospect of doing it. The big step is to realize that you've been trapped by this. You're stuck in that pool of water and all you're doing is fighting other fish for that last little gulp and then they're all going to

die anyhow. Well, it's not just an image of people outside. It's an image for thoughts in the mind. Your greed says, "Just one more thought of greed." Your lust says, "Just one more thought of lust." But there's not even any water there. Or what little water there is, is certainly not enough to keep you going. And then all these thoughts are going to die regardless.

So why are you willing to be their slaves? When you can think of the idea of freedom as being something positive—or, as the Buddha says, when you see renunciation as rest, see renunciation as safety—that's when your heart will leap up.