

## *Lift Up Your Mind*

*November 16, 2020*

An important factor in the practice is respect. There's a passage where the Buddha says that if you lack respect and deference, then you lack a whole set of other qualities that are necessary for the path.

So what do you have to respect? We traditionally respect the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. What does that mean? It means that you respect the human ability to do good—and not only to do good, but through human action to put an end to suffering. That's something we should find inspiring. If you look at the news these days, human behavior is not all that inspiring, but of course it depends on where you look.

It's good to think about the examples you *do* find inspiring. Think about Ajaan Mun coming from a peasant background, coming from the Northeast. In the Thailand of his time, the Northeast was really out in the boonies. The people there were considered to have no real hope of making any kind of advancement in society. Yet, he didn't let that get him down. Just because he was born a peasant didn't mean that he couldn't find awakening: That was his attitude, and he did whatever was needed. It was not an easy path. He ran against a lot of resistance, outside and inside, but he was able to do it.

If you think about Upāsikā Kee, she had her difficulties, too. Here she was, a woman. People looked down on the potential that women would have to practice. She didn't let that get her down. She found a quiet place: an old abandoned monastery. There were just her, her aunt, and her uncle. They created a place to practice, and gradually other people were attracted to it. And a lot of the attraction had to do with her own honesty in detecting her defilements as they got more and more refined.

So think about the people who you find inspiring. Feed your mind there—and then look at yourself. Although there are times when you seem to have a lot of weaknesses, and the practice is very daunting, remember that the people who've succeeded all started out with weaknesses as well. There is a tendency in the biographies of the great ajaans to make it sound as if they were destined to go far in the practice. But again, it was a struggle. Still, they were able to find the resources within themselves. You have to tell yourself, "If they could do it, so can I!"

Now, putting yourself on their level doesn't mean that you lack respect for them. What

you're trying to do is to lift the level of your mind. There's that passage in the definition of right effort—usually translated as *upholding your intent*, but it also can be translated as *lifting up your mind*. Think about the things you find uplifting; raise your sights.

It is possible for human beings to put an end to suffering: That's what it means to have respect for the Buddha. Respect for the Dhamma, of course means that there are things you've got to do. He laid down the law—not that he created the law, but he found what needed to be done, the Buddha, and he set it out.

And he didn't set it out for us to say, "I don't like this, I'm going to replace it with that." Or, "Now that we're living in the twenty-first century in America, we need a more streamlined Dhamma, or an easier Dhamma, or a Dhamma that's more in line with what we want."

After all, what has changed in the human mind? Is greed any different from what it was back then? Is anger any different? Delusion? The problems are all the same. The solutions have to be the same. There may be some minor details, such as what things we're greedy about. But when you get down to the real problem, it's not so much the things; it's the mind's tendency to like greed, to like anger, to like delusion. The objects are only secondary.

So the primary issues are all the same. This is why Ajaan Mun's principle was practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. This is the Buddha's principle, too, for how you show real respect to him.

Respect for the Sangha means realizing that there have been people who have followed the Buddha's instructions, practiced in line with them, and gotten good results. And they've carried the tradition down to us. So this Western tendency to set ourselves up and look down on things outside of our culture is something we have to learn how to overcome.

We have to realize that, like every human being, we're in a position where our defilements can be really strong; and we need whatever examples we can find to lift our minds, so that we can fight against our own defilements. And it does require *lifting* the mind up to the level of the people who have practiced. When that's your attitude, then you're more likely to learn from the tradition and give it a good hearing.

Because it's only when you see your own mistakes—in how you're creating unnecessary suffering for yourself—that you're going to be open to other people's advice. If you think that everything you do is perfectly fine, or good enough, you've closed the door. You have to keep reminding yourself that you could be better. And you want to learn how to live with that possibility in a useful way—in a way that does actually make you better than you have been.

Some people find when they work toward a goal that it makes them tense and frustrated. That's simply a sign that they have to learn to work with goals in a different way. Remember that a large part of the goal we're after here is true happiness. And the word for happiness, *sukha*, can also be translated as: pleasure, bliss, ease, well-being.

So ask yourself, "What kind of breathing right now would lead to bliss? What ways of thinking would lead to a bliss that would be lasting?" We're not just here to relax, or to tell ourselves that "Whatever puts my mind at ease is the Dhamma."

There's the ease that goes nowhere, and there's the ease that goes someplace, and you really see to make the distinction. The ease of a mind that comes into concentration: That goes someplace. The ease of a mind that decides, "I just simply want to relax, and take it easy": That goes nowhere. It slides down.

It's like that hill near Mount Lassen. It's composed of little bits of lava. You start climbing up the hill and you realize that if you wait and stop at some point and stand still, you're slowly sliding down the hill. So if you just stand still and say, "Well, I'm going to stay with whatever puts my mind at ease," you're sliding down the hill. You have to find the ease that pulls you up, or gives the possibility of going up.

So it's important to make that distinction, because there's something else you have to respect in the Dhamma, which is the principle of causality. Our actions don't just have immediate results in the present moment. They also have long-term results. And you have to respect that. This is why it is necessary at times to sacrifice immediate pleasures for the sake of long-term well-being. But fortunately, the whole path is not one of sacrifice. You find that there are pleasures that, at the very least, cause no harm, and there are other pleasures that actually are helpful on the path.

The formula for the first jhana says, *pleasure and rapture born of seclusion*. Sometimes that's translated as *accompanied by* pleasure and rapture. But the word *accompanied by* is not there in the Pali formula related to *pleasure and rapture*. Instead, *they're* said to be accompanied by directed thought and evaluation. The pleasure and the rapture are the things that you really get absorbed in. You have to hold on to the breath as your main object, but the absorption comes with the sense of rapture and well-being that comes from being with a satisfying way of breathing: That's integral to the concentration.

And it's in getting the mind concentrated that way that you can see things a lot more clearly. You can't get the mind into jhana without at least some insight into how the mind

fabricates things. Then as the mind settles down, it can see things more clearly—allowing you to settle down more deeply, more profoundly, and see things more clearly again. That kind of pleasure, that kind of rapture, actually goes someplace; that kind of ease goes someplace. But it is accompanied by the realization that there's more to be done. That, too, you have to respect.

So respecting the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha lifts the mind and lifts the heart, because it lifts our sights as to what's possible. It should give rise to a desire: "Other people can do this; they say it's really good. That's something I crave." That craving, too, is something to respect.

It's the one place in the Canon where the word *craving* is used in a positive sense. That craving for awakening is to be encouraged. It's to be respected.

So feed the mind with good examples, examples that lift your sense of what human beings can do—what *you* as a human being can do—and that give you the encouragement, the strength, and the nourishment to keep on practicing in that direction.