

Tony Bernhard 5-12-2010

Tony Bernhard is one of Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders. He sits on the board of the Sati Center, is a member of the Spirit Rock Planning Committee and hosts sitting groups and teaches dharma in Davis, CA.

Practice is an orderly progression

In the Udana ("inspired utterances") collection of the Khuddaka Nikaya, one chapter is devoted to instructions for the lay followers of the Buddha:

Just as the ocean has a gradual shelf, a gradual slope, a gradual inclination, with a sudden drop-off only after a long stretch, in the same way this Doctrine and Discipline (dhamma-vinaya) has a gradual training, a gradual performance, a gradual progression, with a penetration to freedom only after a long stretch.

— Udana 5.5 (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.05.than.html>)

Although most Western practice focuses on meditation, the Buddha speaks of an orderly progression leading to liberation. Sometimes, in unusual cases, this progression can be rapid:

Then the Blessed One, having encompassed the awareness of the entire assembly with his awareness, asked himself, "Now who here is capable of understanding the Dhamma?" He saw Suppabuddha the leper sitting in the assembly, and on seeing him the thought occurred to him, "This person here is capable of understanding the Dhamma." So, aiming at Suppabuddha the leper, he gave a step-by-step talk, i.e., a talk on giving, a talk on virtue, a talk on heaven; he declared the drawbacks, degradation, & corruption of sensual passions, and the rewards of renunciation. Then when he saw that Suppabuddha the leper's mind was ready, malleable, free from hindrances, elated, & bright, he then gave the Dhamma-talk peculiar to Awakened Ones, i.e., stress, origination, cessation, & path. And just as a clean cloth, free of stains, would properly absorb a dye, in the same way, as Suppabuddha the leper was sitting in that very seat, the dustless, stainless Dhamma eye arose within him, "Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation."

-- Kutthi sutta (Ud 5.3) <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.03.than.html>

Dana

The first step in training begins with the practice of generosity (*dana*), which starts the process of weakening the unawakened practitioner's habitual tendencies to cling to views, to sensuality, and to unskillful modes of thought and behavior.

In the Dana Sutta, (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an07/an07.049.than.html>), the Buddha explains that it is not the gift itself which accumulates merit; it is the intention of the giver. A gift that is given with the intention of profiting the giver does not bear fruit. The same gift, if given by someone "who gives a gift not seeking his own profit, not with a mind attached [to the reward], not seeking to store up for

himself, nor [with the thought], 'I'll enjoy this after death.'" -- and not seeking self-righteous pride in his own virtue, that gift bears great reward. Dana provides a means to live our lives in a way that benefits others. Dana may be an intangible, such forgiveness or gratitude.

The benefit of *dana* depends on the heart with which you give. It is not the value of the gift that counts, but the heart that gives. The action of giving itself does not lead to freedom, but is based on the intention. It is the quality of the heart that you want to cultivate, not the action of giving. Each act of giving makes the next easier. Each giving releases our attachment to things; i.e., *dana* is a path for non-clinging.

Ethics

Sila, or ethics, is another step in achieving freedom. There are three elements of the Eight Fold Path that comprise ethics: Right speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Ethics also includes the Five Precepts:

1. For the purpose of training, I resolve not to take life
2. For the purpose of training, I resolve not to take anything not freely given.
3. For the purpose of training, I resolve not engage in sexual misconduct.
4. For the purpose of training, I resolve not to engage in false speech.
5. For the purpose of training, I resolve not to indulge in intoxicating substances.

For ethical practices, like with *dana*, intention is critical. For example, false speech does not just mean avoiding lies – it means avoiding harm by speech. In the Second World War, if the Nazi's came to your house and asked if you were hiding Anne Frank, it would not be Right Speech to show them where she was hiding.

The Five Precepts are the first layer of ethical behavior, and they are based on the intention of non-harming. The second layer of ethical behavior includes restraint from sensual pleasure. Monastics take the Five Precepts, and add to them refraining from music, dancing and entertainment; refraining from adornments of the body or clothing; refraining from eating after noon; refraining from sleeping on luxurious beds; and refraining from sensual activities. They also refrain from touching money, which helps avoid many sensual pleasures.

There is a third layer of ethical behavior, which is geared to the monastic community. These are described in the Vinaya. Many of the rules are training guides or etiquette. For example, it is considered poor etiquette for a monk to laugh loudly in public (i.e., inhabited) places, to not appreciate alms food, to slurp while eating, or to talk with a full mouth. There are also rules about duties, such as when to sweep the porch and the duties of a pupil to his teacher. The Vinaya provides rules for resolving disputes and unskillful actions.

Heaven

In Buddhism, heaven refers to mental states. For example, by following an ethical path, one can feel the bliss of blamelessness. The heaven realms are those where unpleasantness is low. However, nothing is permanent.

One of the drawbacks of getting what we want is that it doesn't last. This is why the Buddha spoke of giving up pleasures. Renunciation is an unpleasant word. The Buddha speaks of the aversion to renunciation:

Then Ven. Ananda, together with Tapussa the householder, went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to him, sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One: "Tapussa the householder, here, has said to me, 'Venerable Ananda, sir, we are householders who indulge in sensuality, delight in sensuality, enjoy sensuality, rejoice in sensuality. For us — indulging in sensuality, delighting in sensuality, enjoying sensuality, rejoicing in sensuality — renunciation seems like a sheer drop-off. Yet I've heard that in this doctrine & discipline the hearts of the very young monks leap up at renunciation, grow confident, steadfast, & firm, seeing it as peace. So right here is where this doctrine & discipline is contrary to the great mass of people: i.e., [this issue of] renunciation.'"

"So it is, Ananda. So it is. Even I myself, before my Awakening, when I was still an unawakened Bodhisatta, thought: 'Renunciation is good. Seclusion is good.' But my heart didn't leap up at renunciation, didn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'I haven't seen the drawback of sensual pleasures; I haven't pursued [that theme]. I haven't understood the reward of renunciation; I haven't familiarized myself with it. That's why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace.'

"Then the thought occurred to me: 'If, having seen the drawback of sensual pleasures, I were to pursue that theme; and if, having understood the reward of renunciation, I were to familiarize myself with it, there's the possibility that my heart would leap up at renunciation, grow confident, steadfast, & firm, seeing it as peace.'

"So at a later time, having seen the drawback of sensual pleasures, I pursued that theme; having understood the reward of renunciation, I familiarized myself with it. My heart leaped up at renunciation, grew confident, steadfast, & firm, seeing it as peace. Then, quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful qualities, I entered & remained in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation.

All that renunciation is, is letting go, like a snake shedding its skin. The clinging to pleasure causes suffering.

In order for freedom, one must understand the Four Noble Truths. (or The Four Ennobling Truths)

The Truth of Dukka

Life is like the weather – there are good days and rainy days; warm, sunny days, and cold days. We cannot change the weather – we just need to let it go.

Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, dying is suffering, grief and despair are suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering.

The Truth of the Origin of Suffering.

Suffering comes about through craving pleasure. Desires are endless.

The Truth of Cessation of Suffering

Suffering ceases when craving and clinging are abandoned.

The Truth of the Path to Cessation of Suffering

The Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Focus,
not on the rudenesses of others,
not on what they've done
or left undone,
but on what you
have & haven't done yourself.
-- Dhammapada 50