Giving Weight to the Mind

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There’s an interesting feature in the Pali language. The word garu, as in the chant right now, means “one having respect.” It also means “weight.” The things you respect are the things that you give weight to. Weight not in the sense of being burdensome, but weight in the sense of being substantial, ballast. Something that keeps you from floating away or getting blown away by the wind, getting carried away by currents in the river. There’s a weight to your life. There’s a meaningfulness to your life, depending on what you give respect to. This is an important principle in the meditation because we’re giving respect to the Buddha, it means that we’re giving respect to our own minds, giving respect to the actions of our minds and the need to train our minds, because it’s important in our lives. The world of our experience is shaped by what we’re doing. This is why we’re training the minds, because they’re the factor that shapes everything. If we think about the world at large, the decisions that are being made by other people right now, we begin to feel weightless. Not in a good sense. Weightless in the sense of being insubstantial. Weightless in the sense of thinking that the things we do or say or think don’t make any difference. There are people out there who actually want to make war, and it seems that there’s nothing we can do about it. When you dwell on that too much, you start feeling insubstantial. Life has very little meaning. It’s just floating around on the currents. But when you realize that that world out there, even though it may impinge a great deal on your own inner world, it’s not the main factor that shapes your inner world. The main factor that shapes your inner world is the quality of your mind. So we give weight to the decisions of the mind. We give respect to the mind. Respect for what we’re doing right now. As I would have said, this is what makes all the difference between a wise person and a fool. The fact that we see the importance of training our minds, that the happiness and suffering we’re going to experience now and on into the future, depends on how well-trained our minds are. So it’s important that you give weight to this practice. Give respect to this practice. Be diligent in doing it. Be sensitive in doing it. It’s one of the themes that Ajahn Suat liked to repeat over and over again in his Dharma talks. Come to the practice with a sense of respect. If you don’t respect it, you’re not going to get the benefits. You’re not going to get the full benefits that it can give. You realize that the person who set out this practice, the Buddha, is way beyond where we are right now. But he gave us this practice so that we could get to where he is, in the sense of knowing his own mind, developing the good qualities in his own mind. Seeing the subtleties of what goes on in the mind. This is an important part of the practice, looking for subtle things. Otherwise, we go through life obliviously, following our old habits, and thinking, “It’s perfectly okay. We’ve been able to manage so far with our old habitual attitudes. But how well have we really managed?” Is that all you want to do in your life? Or do you want to get better than that, more skillful than that, see what skill can do for your life? Instead of giving a lot of weight to your old opinions and old habits, you give weight to the practice. Instead of trying to figure things out beforehand, you try to develop insight or discernment through developing qualities in the mind. The understandings we bring to the practice come simply from what we’ve heard or what we’ve read and what we’ve theorized about and thought through. But as the Buddha said, that kind of insight, that kind of discernment, doesn’t really make that big a difference in the mind. The big difference comes when you develop qualities like mindfulness. You can read about mindfulness, you can think about mindfulness, but it’s when you really develop it from moment to moment. You catch the mind slipping off, bring it right back. Catch it again, bring it right back again. What does that do to your understanding of mindfulness? It’s an entirely different order. Then you start noticing the effect that your actions throughout the day have on your mind. Little careless thoughts, careless actions. These are important. You have to watch out for them, because otherwise they reverberate through your practice. They show up as carelessness in other areas as well. So you give weight to your actions, weight to the decisions that you make, moment by moment. In this way, your moments have heft, they have weight, in the sense of being substantial. Instead of simply floating through the day along with the currents of your old habits, you’re making decisions. You’re clear about the decisions you’re making. You realize they’re important. You try to be scrupulous. You try to be attentive. You try to catch in any way that they may still be unskillful. Otherwise, there’s no way that you can develop skill. There’s no way you can grow. This is what it means to have respect for the training. You give weight to the training because you give weight to the importance of your own actions, weight to the importance of your own mind. Mind shaping your world, and weight to the desire to shape things well. Not only to shape things, but also to find what lies beyond the shaping. Your desire for true happiness. Give weight to that as well. The other meaning for the word karu is value. Something of high value is also said to be karu. When you show respect for your actions, they have value. When you show respect for the training, it has value in your life. Your life becomes a valuable life. You become the sort of person who can be an island for yourself. Islands are made of rock. Even though they’re in the middle of the river, they don’t flow down the river. They stay right where they are. They get you above the flood. You need that kind of solidity in your practice. Otherwise, the floods will just wash you away.

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