Truth Is Where You’re True

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The Buddha says that you are your own mainstay. You’re your own protector. Who else would you look to for protection? And when he says this, you have to take a good and hard look at yourself. What inside you can you really trust? What can you trust as a mainstay? What inside you can you trust as your protector? And you can see a lot of things in yourself that you can’t trust. That calls into question, how can you be your own mainstay? What he’s basically saying is that you have the potential to be your own mainstay. You have to look inside yourself for what quality of mind can you trust. One way of getting that is looking at the qualities of mind that you can’t trust. One very obvious one is the tendency to make excuses for yourself—one, about your intentions, and two, about the results of your actions. If you can lie to yourself about your intentions or lie to yourself as to what actually happened as a result of your actions, that’s a part of the mind you know you can’t trust. You’ve seen it many times before. So looking at the other side of that means that part of your mind that is very honest about your intentions and is honest about the results of your actions, that’s something you can trust. And it’s precisely that quality that we develop in the meditation. It’s really looking at your mind, seeing what your intention is, trying to be very clear about your intention, and what comes about as a result of your meditation. These are the qualities of mind we’re developing here. One of the early problems you run into as you meditate is the way the mind slips off without telling you. You suddenly find yourself someplace else, thinking about what you did last week, thinking about what you’re planning to do next week, and you wonder, “How did you get there?” Well, it’s this ability of the mind to lie to itself. Because there’s a part of the mind that knows that it’s going to slip off, and yet it can hide itself from itself, as if we’re pulling a curtain down over everything. And then when the curtain comes up, you’re someplace else, and you don’t know exactly how the scenery changed. So this is one of the issues we have to deal with as we’re meditating, knowing that the mind is going to slip off and watching for it, trying to catch the first little signs that something is amiss. It’s bored with the breath, or it’s got something else it really wants to think about, and so it pretends to stay with the breath for a while. In the meantime, it’s planning its escape. Like the prisoner who stays in the room when the wardens come by, and has been tunneling under the wall when the wardens aren’t looking. So it wants to escape. Zip, it’s out through the tunnel and gone. And so don’t regard distraction as a minor irritation. It’s actually one of the main things you’re trying to understand as you meditate. And you understand it best by trying to fight it, sticking with the breath as best you can, and noticing as quickly as possible when you’ve gone off. And this is like learning to look for those warning signals that the mind is about to go, learning to recognize them and try to reestablish mindfulness with extra strength. Because what you’re doing here is developing the mind’s capacity to keep tabs on itself, to be honest with itself. If it’s going someplace, you want it to come and say, “Hey, look, I’m going here, and these are my reasons.” And if you think the reasons are good, okay, then the mind can go and think about those things, and then it can come back. Everything is all open and upward. That’s the kind of mind you want. That’s the kind of mind you can trust. That kind of mind can be your mainstay. But this business of sneaking off without asking permission, you certainly don’t want that in your family. Why do you want it in your mind? And as long as it’s there in the mind, you really can’t trust yourself. And as the Buddha said, if you can’t trust yourself, how are you going to trust somebody else? And how is anybody else going to trust you? And we take refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma and the Sangha as examples of truthful people, because we recognize in them the truthfulness that we want to develop. But we don’t really know how far that truthfulness can take us. And when the Buddha says, “Nirvana is the greatest happiness,” we have some doubts about that. And the only way we’re going to find out for sure whether it really is truly the greatest happiness is to learn how to be true to ourselves. This is one of the really fine things about the Dhamma, is that people who aren’t true to themselves will never know the Dhamma, what the Dhamma truly is. It requires that you be a very truthful person. In order to understand it, in order to experience it. And when you stop to think about it, would you want to believe in any kind of religious goal that would allow you still to be dishonest with yourself, that simply speaks to your desire for things to be easy, for somebody else to come in and do things for you, and they still leave you dishonest, still leave you with a lot of confused mindfulness? Would you trust a goal like that? Many people would like to. That’s the problem. They like to. They don’t want to deal with their own inner dishonesty. For this path, everything starts with this ability to look truthfully at yourself. The Buddha’s instructions to his son, Rahula, started first with the issue of truthfulness. He says you can’t be a true contemplative, you can’t be a true meditator, unless you’re truthful. It means not only truthful when you’re talking to other people, but when you’re truthful inside. Then he applies this principle to precisely this issue of looking at your intentions, looking at your actions and results, and then looking to see if you can detect any mistakes, any dishonesty, any harmfulness in the intention, in the action, in the results. If you do it, you make up your mind not to repeat that action. Developing that basic faculty of the mind that we want to learn, that we’ve found that we can trust, in those random moments when we’re truthful to ourselves, what we’re doing is to try to keep them from being so random, being more consistent in being truthful, being more sensitive to whatever harm you’re causing yourself or causing other people, even in your meditation. We were talking yesterday about the Buddha’s instructions on emptiness. It comes basically down to looking at what disturbance you’re causing, given whatever perception you’re holding on to, and seeing if you can replace that with something else. Replace it with a more refined perception. Settle there, and then look again to see which parts of the mind are empty of the disturbances you had before, and which ones still have disturbance. Again, that’s a development of that quality of truthfulness. So you’re taking this quality that you know deep down inside is one of your more reliable qualities, and pursuing it to see how far it can take you. It’s precisely that quality that’s going to open things up to the Deathless, to the unlimited freedom that the Buddha taught as being the only true health for the mind. We may not trust him yet, but he says it’s by developing this quality that you’ve learned to trust in the past that you’re going to see whether or not what he says is right. So in one way, that’s all he’s asking you to do is to develop your more reliable qualities of mind, particularly the mindfulness and alertness that allows you to be honest about your intentions and your actions. You don’t have to look far away. He’s not asking you to believe that there’s some greater metaphysical principle that hides behind the surface of reality. He says just look at the way the mind lies to itself. Look at the moments when the mind is truthful with itself. Develop that truthfulness and then see how far it goes. What better path could you want? What more reliable path could you want? The greatest truths in the world come from being truthful right here, right now, with yourself. The quality of mind that allows you to see what you’re doing right now and to be honest about the results of what you’re doing is the same quality of mind that’s going to allow you to find your freedom. We trust the Buddha because we know that he asks us to trust him. We trust what is most trustworthy within ourselves. Simply that he asks us to develop that quality more than we’ve developed in the past. And we’ll find that it will take us to places that we could never imagine otherwise. That’s one of the reasons why we keep focused right here. Because right here is where that quality is, where it functions, and where it can be trained.

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