The Wealth of Simplicity

April 9, 2007

Back during World War II, one of the ways they tried to keep people helping the war, or helping the cause, was if they were going to take a trip, to ask themselves, “Is this trip necessary?” That’s a good question to ask yourself as you practice. While you’re sitting here meditating and the mind wanders off, is this trip necessary? While you’re meditating, it’s pretty easy to answer, “Well, no.” Occasionally, if you find that you have real trouble settling down, you may need to think a bit about what the problem is and what the antidote might be. Then bring that antidote in. For example, if you’re feeling lazy, you can think about death. Death could come at any time. Is your work done? Well, no. Okay, get back to work. When you’re feeling discouraged, think about all the members of the Sangha in the past, all the monks and the nuns who were going crazy, one way or another. There’s a story about a monk who said he hadn’t experienced a finger-snap worth of stillness in thirty years. He was ready to commit suicide, but he suddenly came to his senses and became an Arahant. The nun who kept running amok, as she said, out of her hut, finally was able to settle down. We have no idea what their issues were, but at least we’re not to the point where we’re running amok yet or contemplating suicide. So we’re not nearly as bad off as they are. They were able to pull themselves together. Well, so can you. Then think about what you need to do to pull yourself together. Then there are standard antidotes. The antidote for lust is to contemplate first the object of your lust. Imagine that person as a dead person, one day, two days, three days dead. Then you say, “No, I can’t.” You can’t feel lustful of that person anymore, but then you’ve got this desire inside. You still want to be lustful for something. Well, that shows the problem is not the object. The problem is inside. Then you want to turn around and say, “Well, why do you like your lust?” Work on that until you’re able to settle down and come back to the breath. Always use the breath as your home base. If you need meditation where to go along with it? Fine, but try to stay as close to the breath as possible and keep the issues as few as possible. The basic message all the way through is to simplify, simplify, simplify. Keep things simple. I’ve mentioned many times before the instruction I got from Ajahn Fuhr. Before I opened my mouth to say something, he said, “Ask yourself, is this necessary?” I found it cut down on my conversation quite a bit, all to the good. The same principle, of course, applies to the chatter in your mind. Is this chatter necessary? You don’t have to get involved in the conversation. The basic question is to ask yourself, “This thing that I want to say, one, is it true? Two, is it actually beneficial? Three, is this the right time and place for it?” In a place like this, where people are meditating and trying to keep their minds quiet, you want to say only things that are helpful. Disturb their peace of mind as little as possible. This way, as we pare down our own issues, we become less of a burden, both to ourselves and the people around us. Ajahn Fuhr had another comment one time. He said, “Lots of times we think when the mind has lots of things going, it’s wealthy.” He said, “No, actually, that’s when it’s poor.” When the mind only has one or two things going, that’s when it’s wealthy. It can give its full attention. It’s like an exotic fruit in the market. If there’s only one piece of that exotic fruit, it’s going to have a really high cost. If it’s all over the market, it doesn’t have any cost anymore. It doesn’t have any value anymore. So try to keep the value of your mind high, the value of your thinking, your actions, your thoughts, your words, and deeds. Keep things pared down. Keep things simple. Try to have as few issues as possible, because that’s when you begin to see what the real issues are. A lot of our thinking is pretty much evasive action. We’ve got a big, looming issue in the mind, and we just don’t want to face it, don’t want to take it on. So we find other things to do, other things to think about, other things to get worked up about. And, of course, the big issue gets left undone. So anything that comes up, either inside your meditation or in events outside your meditation, if you can find a way of making it as little an issue as possible, go in that direction. Instead of elaborating on it, that’s what’s meant by vipabhancha, the way the mind proliferates thoughts. The thoughts don’t just go scattering out, but they also come back and they attack you. The analysis is this. First, there’s contact at the senses, and from the contact comes feeling. So it’s not just an event of feeling anymore. It’s what one feels, one perceives. The person comes in now. You’ve identified a sense of who you are as the feeler, and then you become the perceiver. And then what you perceive, then you start thinking about. And then all the categories of proliferation come back and attack you, your thoughts. Who I am, what I want, what I like, what I don’t like. They not only attack other people, they come back and bite you. So when you see the mind proliferating like that, try to pare it down, pare it down, pare it down. Have as few issues as possible. That way you can be light, light on yourself, light on other people, light in both senses of the word. A shining example for yourself, and weigh yourself down. The fewer issues, the better. The fewer issues, the less complexity. So complexity is to handle just lots of balls you’re juggling in the air. Sometimes it seems like the meditation becomes one more ball that you’re juggling. Well, try to make that the place where you stand. Not only while your mind stands on this object here in the meditation. That’s the image they have in the Pali. Aramana means basically a support, something you stand on. Like the breath is your aramana, it’s your support right now. Make that your support as you go through the day. You’re in the body, standing on the breath, standing in the breath. Think of the breath surrounding you, bathing you. It becomes your force field that you carry around. Make tending to that force field your prime responsibility. Now, if you have lots of other issues, it makes it difficult to tend to that. You get up from your meditation and you drop everything right here. Then when you go out to juggle all the different balls you have in the course of the day, you don’t have any really solid place to stand. And of course, that makes it more difficult to juggle them. Think of yourself standing in the breath, surrounded by the breath, bathed by the breath, permeated by the breath. You can envision your body as a big wire cage and the breath flows in, flows out, through all the holes, no problem at all. Nothing needs to be pulled. Nothing needs to be pushed. And the wires start to glow. If you find that helpful image, use it. If it’s not, find another image that you find helps keep you with the breath, in the breath, throughout the day. That’s your one issue. And then you pick up other issues after that. As soon as you don’t have to pick them up, you just put them down. The fewer things you have to carry around, the wealthier you are. That way, it’s easier to find harmony inside, easier to maintain harmony throughout the community. It’s easier for us to try to keep paring our issues down, down, down, as simple as possible. Anything that doesn’t have to become an issue, don’t let it become an issue. Don’t make it become an issue. Just keep it simple. That way, the really important things come to the fore, and you can deal with them straight on.

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