Harmony

July 27, 2010

Those of us who are going to be living together for the rains, it’s good to reflect on the Buddha’s teachings on how to live together in harmony, so that by living together we’re helpful to one another and we’re not getting in the way of one another’s practice. And even for those of us who are not going to stay here for the three months still, it’s good to reflect on what the Buddha had to say about living together. Because we all live with people. Even when you’re living alone, you’re living with a person who has lots of people inside. There are six qualities that the Buddha talked about as conducive to harmony. The first three form a set, that you act with intentions of goodwill. These include your physical actions, your verbal actions, and your mental actions. Whatever action you’re going to do, that has an impact on the people around you. Try to make sure that you’re coming from goodwill, wishing for your true happiness and wishing for the other person’s true happiness as well. You’re not going to do or say or think anything that’s going to get in the way of that principle. And the Buddha further recommends that you maintain these thoughts of goodwill, these intentions of goodwill, both in public and in private. In other words, even when you’re off by your own, if you have any thoughts that have an impact on anybody around you. You want to make sure they come from goodwill, because people can sense where you’re coming from. There are times when you have to say things that are unpleasant for the other person to hear. But if you’re coming from goodwill, you’ll think about what’s the best time to say that, what are the best words to say that. And when you’re coming from goodwill, the other person is much more likely to listen. There’s a principle among the monks that if you have some issue with another monk’s behavior, you want to make sure that before you say anything to the monk about that behavior, that you’re coming from goodwill. If the monk’s behavior involves an offense, you want to get the monk out of the offense. And it’s not just because you want to lash out. Sometimes it can take a long time to get your mind around that space of being motivated by goodwill. But you find that the wait is worth it, that the issue gets resolved a lot more easily if this is where you’re coming from. As for the other three principles, the first one is that whatever gains you have, you share them. If you gain something special, you make sure that others have a piece of it, too. This is a very clear way that you really are coming from goodwill. And it’s not just idle thoughts. You gain something special, you spread it around. You don’t just keep it for yourself. The fifth principle is in terms of your virtue, the precepts you hold to the way you behave. As if the community all abides by a level of virtue that they hold in common, it’s a lot easier for them to get along. As the Buddha says, “Virtues that are untorn, unsplattered, conducive to consciousness, concentration.” Those are the virtues you want to hold to, again, in public and in private. The sixth principle is that you have views in common, leading to the right ending of stress. As for views dealing with other things, just let them go. We’re here to work on the Buddhist teachings, to use the Buddhist teachings to deal with this problem, to solve this problem in our minds. That’s our primary purpose of being here. So views about other things, you just keep them to yourself. As for views about the practice, we try to keep them on the same level. In other words, share in right view. If there is right view with regard to any particular issue, then hold that right view. By holding this standard, it creates a sense of harmony, community, which our living together is conducive. We become admirable friends to one another in terms of our virtue, our conviction, our wisdom, our generosity. We create an inspiring example for one another. If you see someone else has a level of behavior that’s admirable, you ask yourself, “Okay, am I on that level? What can I do to bring myself up to that level?” In other words, these are topics we can talk about and these are things we want to emulate in one another. Whatever you see in another person’s behavior, whether it’s good or bad, always reflect back. Instead of focusing your thoughts on that other person, reflect back on yourself. If you see something that’s admirable, do you have that? If you see something that’s less than admirable, do you have that quality in yourself as well? Do you see it in another person? This is what it looks like from the outside. Do you want your behavior to look like that? That’s why we bring our views up to the same level, we bring our virtue up to the same level. The life in the community gets smoother as a result. As one of the principles of the Buddha said, it’s conducive to the practice when people are living in harmony. It makes it a lot easier to practice when there’s disharmony in the community, as we’ve seen in the past year. Not here so much, but in the monastic community around the world, where there’s disharmony, there’s a lot of strife. And it reverberates through the community in many different ways. It makes it more difficult to practice. People get distracted. And as a result, what suffers? Well, on the one hand, we suffer. Our virtue, our concentration, our discernment suffers. So always keep in mind that this principle of harmony is important. And it’s not just an artificial harmony where we try to cover up our differences. We want to make sure that there are no differences in terms of our views, in terms of our virtue. We treat one another with goodwill. We’re generous with our gains, with our belongings. In this way, we create a good environment for the practice and we create a good example for others as well. When other people come here, they find a community that’s in harmony. That’s something really special. You look around the world and there’s so much disharmony right now. And there are so many people who find that they can make money off of creating disharmony. It’s something special that we have a community here where everybody’s working together with a common purpose. We’re just trying to see if we can take the Buddhist teachings and make them work for ourselves. So whenever you say or do or think something, try to keep these principles in mind. So your actions are conducive to harmony inside yourself and for harmony in the community as a whole.

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