Attachment to Views

January 9, 2012

Attachment to views doesn’t mean seeing that one thing is right and another thing is wrong. After all, the path—there’s right view and there’s wrong view, right resolve and wrong resolve, right and wrong all the way down, all the factors of the path. Attachment to views means that you simply hold to the view as an end in and of itself, or thinking that the view in and of itself is going to make you a better person than other people. We’re not here to be better than other people. We’re here to be better than what we are, healthier than what we are. It’s like going to a hospital. There’s no point in going from room to room and trying to have a contest to see who’s the healthiest person. Everybody’s sick one way or another, and each person’s duty is to look after his or her own illness. And the doctors are there to help them recover. Remember, the main image of the Buddha is as a doctor. And that’s with every illness. There are medicines that are right and medicines that are wrong, or medicines that in a small dose can be helpful but in a large dose can kill you. And so it’s the skill in how you apply the views for the purpose of release. Remember the four noble dhammas—noble virtue, noble concentration, noble discernment, and noble release. The first three are for the sake of the last. The release is the essence of the teaching. It’s the core, the heartwood of the teaching. That’s where this is all aimed. And everything else is right or wrong as it helps in that direction. This is why when we’re meditating and insights arise, it’s not something that you’re collecting. It’s not like going down to the shore and finding beautiful shells and beautiful stones that you pick up and take home and stick on your shelf. The insights are there to help you gain release. And some insights will help and others will not. You can’t trust that everything that comes up in a quiet mind is going to be useful or going to be correct or reliable or trustworthy. As John Fung used to say, “Not to make a diary of your meditation.” If an insight arises, try to see how it’s relevant to what’s actually going on in your mind right here, right now. And if it’s not relevant right here, right now, put it aside. You don’t have to collect it. It’s like that old story about the goose that laid the golden egg. That’s how it often happens in fairy tales. If you keep golden eggs, they turn into golden eggs. They have feathers and coal. So with the goose that lays the golden egg, you make sure the goose is healthy so it keeps on laying golden eggs. And when the golden egg comes out, you use it right away. In other words, you try to keep your concentration going, keep your concentration solid, keep your focus on the insights that arise. You see how they can be used right here, right now. And if they’re not useful, let them turn into coal and feathers. But don’t keep them. Put them aside. I had a student once who, because of some memory problems, did keep a diary of her meditation experiences. I saw that as John Fung was right in many ways, that when you have a diary, you try to find wise things to put in the diary. And a lot of the wisdom you would develop can very easily go off in directions that are not really helpful. The test always is appropriate attention before noble truths. To what extent does this insight give you insight into how to comprehend suffering or stress, how to abandon its cause, or how to develop the path so that you can realize cessation? Those are the issues. And everything should get tested by those issues. And if the insight has done its work, there’ll be a letting go. Then you’re quiet to watch to see what happens next. How does the mind move in to ruin what’s just happened? Because it happens very, very often. There are many layers to the mind. Something happens and there’s a nice letting go, and then you clamp onto that. That’s it, as far as that particular insight goes. You have to wait to see, “Well, what’s going to come up next? And what’s going to come up next?” This is why you can’t sit and get complacent about your insight. You can’t sit and be complacent about your understanding. This has been the end of a lot of meditators. There are cases in the canon of people who gain knowledge of their previous lives or see beings arising after death. And that’s as far as I take it. They set themselves up as experts. I saw so-and-so dying and being reborn in this way. And the Buddha points out in one of his suttas that many times the knowledge that comes in this way can be very limited, and you can end up with either severe wrong view, because there are cases where someone does good in this lifetime and goes through a really bad rebirth in the next one. And if that’s all you know and all you see, then you say, “Well, there’s no connection between your actions and your after-death fate.” That’s severe wrong view. And the Buddha’s wise enough not to stop there. He realized that neither of those knowledges in and of itself was going to put an end to suffering. So he looked into them to see what kind of lesson can be drawn from these that will help put an end to suffering. And he noticed that once he saw the connection between actions and the pleasure and pain that you’re going to experience, he said, “Well, let’s look at what’s the action here.” And from the action he got into the intention and the mind, and this direction is to add tension into what is actually going on in the mind in the present moment. That’s why he came into the present moment. Not because it’s a wonderful moment or it’s all we’ve got, but it’s because decisions are being made here, and these decisions are going to have an impact right now and down the line. And it’s through understanding the connection between intention and attention here in the present moment, that’s how he was able to gain awakening. And that was the heartwood. At that point, he had to let go of all of his other insights and knowledge. And there even comes a point in the very end stages of the path where you let go of the path itself. But that doesn’t mean you can’t let go. It doesn’t mean he didn’t come back and use that knowledge when he was teaching. From experience, he’d seen what works and what doesn’t work, and what works halfway and what works all the way. And as he said, there were many paths that would lead to a human rebirth, or better or worse, but there was only one path that led out entirely. So this is why there is right view and wrong view and right resolve and wrong resolve all the way down to right concentration or wrong concentration. The Buddha wasn’t Mr. Nice Guy. He wouldn’t go along with what everybody wanted. There are a lot of myths about the Buddha as a teacher, one of them being that the rules that he set up were in line with what everybody asked for. People complained about monks misbehaving or nuns misbehaving, so the Buddha said, “Okay, I’ll make a rule for that.” There are a few cases where he did that, but there are also cases where people wanted the monks and nuns to behave in a certain way, and the Buddha said, “No, that’s not going to be right.” He stood his ground and encouraged the monks to stand their ground, too. There’s a passage where he says, “Just as the sea doesn’t overstep its bounds, in the same way the monks don’t overstep the rules that he’s laid down, even at the cost of their lives.” So the rule of principles aren’t there just for your convenience, to be changed when they’re not convenient. They’re there to make it convenient for release. And they’re convenient because they’re categorical across the board. And the Buddha did encourage you to stick by them. So when you hear the phrase “non-attachment of views,” you have to be very clear about what it means. There is a point in the path where, as the Buddha said, you let go of everything. But it’s because you’ve reached the right spot. You’ve developed the right level of sensitivity to the present moment, to what’s going on here. So at that point, you don’t need anything else. But to get to that spot, there are right turns and wrong turns. The Buddha never said that every path leads to the top of the mountain, that anybody who’s on the top of the mountain knows there are lots of paths that don’t lead to the top of the mountain. And he was very clear about what the wrong paths were. And it’s very disconcerting nowadays to see people attributing to the Buddha things that he actually said were out-and-out wrong. They’re wrong then, they’re wrong now. But remember, right and wrong here are determined not because they make you a better person, or than other people, but because some things work and other things don’t. So you use what works as long as it works. And then when it’s not working anymore, you put it aside. The Buddha had many levels to his teaching. There are times when he talks about papanca as being a bad thing, but you actually see him using papanca-type thought, the thought that deals in terms of people’s identities, who you are in the world in which you live, the level of being in which you’re occupying right now. He talks in those terms to motivate people to practice. That’s when he has you think about all the many lifetimes you’ve had, so many that the tears you’ve shed are greater than the water in the ocean. And the blood you’ve lost by having your head cut off for various reasons in your many, many lifetimes, that’s more than the water in the oceans. That kind of thinking is to get you motivated. And then when it’s done its job, you put it aside. You focus on what’s to be done right here, right now. And you drop those papanca categories. You focus instead on simply events as they’re happening. And then there comes a point where you’ve got to drop your focus even on the events, because you’re going to open up to something that’s beyond the events. So we’re learning a skill here. And this is why the training is an apprenticeship. It’s not just a series of books that you read or exams you can take. But it’s a training of the whole person. So you can get sensitive to the skills and the levels of skill and see what works in what kind of situation, what doesn’t work in another kind of situation. So the mind can be trained all around. So it reaches the point where, in its training, it gets to the other shore, as they say. At that point, you don’t need the raft anymore. But you still show your gratitude to the raft for your appreciation. This is a good raft. But that doesn’t mean you have to carry it around. This is where the issue of non-attachment to views actually becomes total non-attachment. But even then, as we see in the case of the Buddha, he would teach other people how to use the raft, what worked and what didn’t. How to make a raft for themselves. That’s not called attachment to views. That’s called skillful use of views. So always keep that distinction in mind.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2012/120109_Attachment_to_Views.mp3>