More than Mindfulness

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When you’re talking about bringing the Dhamma into daily life, or bringing your daily life into the Dhamma, we have to remember it involves a lot more than just mindfulness. Mindfulness on its own, especially if it’s the stripped down form of mindfulness that’s been taught over the past several decades, doesn’t make that much of a difference. You think of presidents ordering drone strikes, mindfully. Or business executives cheating their customers, mindfully. It’s pretty much the same thing. You have to remember that the training is a training, not just of the mind, but of the heart. And it has to be all around. This is where the list of the Barnamis is useful. In Theravada there are ten. In the Mahayana there are six. In fact, when I was working on the textbook for its religions, my primary reader was a scholar of early Mahayana. And she was surprised when I mentioned in the chapter on Theravada that most Theravadans look at their practice not in terms of the Eightfold Path, but in terms of the ten Baramis, the ten perfections. But it’s a teaching that goes way back. The Buddha himself never talked about this list, but if you look at the list you can see that it contains nothing that’s not already there in the Buddha’s other teachings. And it is a good list to think about as you think about daily life. The problem with the list is that it’s not really well organized. It’s kind of random. But you can put it under the Buddha’s teachings on determination, because that’s what the Baramis are. The perfections are a determination that you’re going to devote your life to awakening. And even if you can’t be spending all your time off in a forest meditating, you can develop the qualities of an awakened mind, or the qualities that are needed to gain awakening in daily life, in your own private practice, and also in your interaction with other people. So what kind of determination do we have? As the Buddha said, there are four qualities for good determination. Discernment, Truth, Renunciation or Relinquishment, and then Calm. You need all of these. For a good determination to succeed, one, you have to be wise in discerning and choosing what would be a good goal, and also having a clear sense of what is needed to gain that goal, and the resolve that you’re going to stick with it. It’s interesting that resolve, right resolve, comes under the discernment factor of the past. The discernment is not just a matter of seeing things as they are, but of trying to make the best use out of that knowledge. That’s the first quality. The second quality is Truth. Once you’ve decided that something really is good, you stick with it, through thick or through thin. And you learn to energize yourself to stay with it as well. You don’t follow the path only when you feel like it, or only when you have the energy. We have a guide to learning how to swim floating around the monastery. The reason it’s here at the monastery is because it talks about how to master the skill of swimming, and the lessons it gives are applicable to meditation as well. And one of the instructions it has is that on days when you don’t have the time to put a lot of time into practice, practicing your swimming, you make sure that even if it’s just a little bit of time, you make sure that your form is good. So if you only have a few minutes of time for meditation, make sure that its form is good, i.e., you really do stick with the breath. You really do put away all other thoughts. Then there’s the quality of relinquishment. There are going to be a lot of things you’re going to have to give up. Once you’ve made a determination, you begin to realize that not all your desires are going to be met. Some of your desires are actually in conflict with it. I received a message from someone today asking if the inability to stick with what you know is really right is a sign of irrationality. Well, it’s a sign that you don’t know all the mind’s reasons. You don’t know all the mind’s goals. The problem is we have so many different goals in there for conflicting. And you really have to sit down and think about, well, what goals should come first? What ones have to take the back seat that you’re going to have to give up? And finally, the fourth quality is calm, learning how to be at ease with all this. Maintain your calm as you practice. So when the ups come, you don’t get complacent. When the downs come, you don’t get discouraged. You stay on an even keel. And with these four qualities, you can put the perfections under them, like under the perfection of discernment. You have discernment itself, which is one of the perfections, plus goodwill. Someone said that if you have ill will for anyone, it’s a sign of wrong view. Think about that. Right view is all about the causes of suffering and how to put an end to them. And ill will sees things wrongly. It sees that your suffering is going to end when you see somebody else suffer. That’s not in line with the principles of right view. Goodwill is related to right resolve, but it is one of the right resolves. So goodwill is one of the beginning signs of discernment. And remember, what does discernment talk about? It talks about why you’re suffering as you go through the day. Ask yourself, are you suffering because of other people? Are you suffering because of the economy, the weather, whatever? Well, no. The Buddha’s analysis is that you’re suffering from something inside. So when you’re cast around trying to find the cause for why the mind is suffering, keep looking inside. It’s not letting everybody else off the hook. There are people who are doing unskillful things. But remember, you’re suffering from their lack of skill, because of your own lack of skill. That’s an attitude you have to carry throughout the day. As for truth, it covers the perfection of truth, the perfection of persistence, and the perfection of virtue. You stick with your precepts. You stick with the task of trying to let go of unskillful thoughts and develop skillful ones. Again, you’re suffering when you do that throughout the day. It’s not something you do only while you’re sitting or meditating. You find anger comes up, you have to say, “I’ve got to get rid of that anger first before I can deal with other people.” You’re not going to speak out of anger. You’re not going to act out of anger. Try to calm the mind. Then act. This is not to say that there are not things that you can do to change the world around you, but it goes a lot better if you’re coming from a skillful place inside. And you stick to the truth. Truth as one of the precepts basically means that you’re going to speak in light of what you think is true. Truth as a perfectionist means you’re going to try to find out what really is true, particularly what really is true about what’s going on in your mind. With the precepts you can get by on good intentions, but perfection as a truth means more than just good intentions. You’re trying to get down to what really is the problem. When you have made up your mind to do something good, then you stick with it. You don’t turn traitor to your discernment. That’s another meaning of the perfection of truth. As for relinquishment, there’s generosity, and then there’s renunciation. Generosity, of course, can take many forms as you go through the day. You give of your time, you give of your forgiveness, you give of your energy. A while back I was talking about, thinking about how the Buddha came from an agrarian society. And one of the lessons you learn by being a farmer, one of them is you don’t get anything until you put the work in. In other words, you have to plant the seeds, tend to the crops, before you can get to eat the crops. And so you realize we’re not here on this planet just to get. We have to give first before we can gain the benefits of being a human being. So look around for areas where you can be giving. Take joy in that. It’s one of the reasons why the Buddha protects the perfection of giving by telling the monks, when people come and say, “Where should I give this gift?” You’re supposed to tell them, “Wherever you feel inspired, wherever you feel will be well used.” Generosity is never imposed on anyone. A while back a Buddhist charity was set up, and it would advertise how good Buddhists should give to this Buddhist charity, which is missing the whole point of generosity. Generosity has to be voluntary for it really to be a perfection. Now in terms of getting the most out of your generosity, the Buddha said, “That’s a different question.” The question of where it should be given, that’s up to you. But if you want to get the most out of it, then you start thinking about what attitude do you bring to your gift? What attitude do you bring to the act of giving itself? And how do you reflect on it afterwards? It’s in that way that generosity becomes a skill. As for renunciation, we tend to think of that as deprivation, but the Buddha is basically describing it as looking for pleasure in ways that don’t involve sensuality. And how do you do that? You develop concentration. You find pleasure in being still. You find pleasure in just the way you breathe, the way you relate to the body. And you think about bringing mindfulness into daily life. This is where right mindfulness comes. You’re mindful to stay with your body. Carry it around with a sense of ease. That makes it a lot easier to develop a lot of the other qualities because you’re not placing unnecessary burdens on yourself by breathing in ways that are thoughtless, breathing in ways that are unskillful. We don’t tend to think of breathing as a skill, but it is. It’s probably one of the most basic ones there is. And so you renounce the mind’s tendency to think about sensual thoughts and to find pleasure in sensual fantasies and say, “I’ve got to keep my mind here with the breath.” And that’s how you discover that relinquishment is not deprivation. It’s basically a matter of learning how to know what you give up so you can get something better. It’s a trade-up. And finally, calm. There are two perfections here. You’ve got patience and equanimity. Equanimity means keeping your mind on an even keel. Patience means that when people do things to you that are really unskillful, you don’t lash back. You don’t lash back. You keep some control. Control over your reactions. Equanimity is somewhat more inward. You learn to take whatever’s happening and not let the mind get upset. This, of course, is going to involve some discernment to thinking about why you shouldn’t get upset or how you can look at things in a way that doesn’t get you upset. Think about the principle of karma. You’ve been through many, many, many lifetimes and you’ve probably done lots of unskillful things. So it’s not outrageous that unskillful things happen to you or unpleasant things happen to you. There’s a passage where the Buddha talks about the ways that people can talk to you. They can talk to you in friendly ways or unfriendly ways, kind ways or unkind ways. True, the words can be true and the rules can be false. They can have good intentions, bad intentions. And this is normal in the world. So there’s nothing outrageous about times when people are speaking to you in ways that are untrue, ill-meaning. Which, of course, means that you don’t have any extraordinary rights to say or do unskillful things in response. So as Venerable Sariputta recommended, if something unpleasant gets said to you, as long as it’s being said, just tell yourself that an unpleasant sound is making contact with the ear. When the sound stops, okay, the sound has stopped. And let it stop right there. For most of us, though, we don’t let it stop right there. We bring it in. It reverberates around in the mind. Which, of course, makes it harder and harder to be patient, to endure it. So this gets back to the original teaching on discernment. People can be saying and doing horrible things, but you’re the one that’s making yourself suffer from that. If you can have that perspective, that’s what it really means to make your daily life dharma. You look for the causes of your suffering inside. If you’re going to put an end to it, you look for the path to the end inside. That was an act of generosity. You might try to change things outside if you can, but do it from a position of being patient, equanimous, wise, with lots of goodwill. So bringing the dharma into daily life, or bringing your life and making it dharma, requires a lot more than just garden variety mindfulness. It requires a whole range of qualities you can develop. And as you go through the day, meeting up with difficulties that happen in the course of the day, it’s good to keep this list in mind. Particularly the list about determination. That you’re determined to get what good qualities you can out of any situation. Even if it means just plain old endurance. I have a monk student who, for years, wanted to go up into the forest. Finally got into the forest, and he found that his mind was a mess. He thought that being alone, being undisturbed by other people, everything would settle down inside. Well, it didn’t settle down for quite a while. But yes, he told himself, “Well, there’s nothing else than developing the perfection of patience and endurance.” He realized that if that’s what’s needed, that’s what you’re going to learn. Often we have our ideas about, “Today I want to develop this perfection,” or “Today I want to develop this quality in the mind.” And other events come up, they get in the way. But ask yourself, “What quality, what good qualities among the perfections can I develop given the situation?” Work on those. Krishnaji, you make a perfection out of anything that life throws at you. If you have that attitude, then your daily life is established in the Dhamma. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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