Where Are You Going Q

May 9, 2018

Everything is rooted in desire, as the Buddha said. Everything we do, everything we experience, is shaped by our desires. The question is, what do we want? We’re born into this world. We don’t know where we came from. But we do want something. We want happiness. The problem is finding out what happiness is and how to find it. This is why, even though desire lies at the root of all things, we don’t always get what we want. Because we’re pretty ignorant about what actions will lead you to happiness and which ones won’t. And sometimes we’re ignorant about what kind of goal we want to set for ourselves. As children, our parents set goals for us. When we go to school and grow up, society has lots of goals for us. But the question is, are those the goals we want? And are they the ones that are best for us? Part of becoming an adult is taking some time out. Ask yourself, where do you really want to go? And think about what kind of goal would be really worthwhile. The Buddha offers his teachings as a way to find true happiness. And when you think about it, this is what we all want. A happiness that doesn’t change. A happiness that doesn’t turn into something else, i.e., non-happiness. A happiness that doesn’t disappoint. And he says it’s possible to find a happiness that doesn’t die, even as the body dies. There’s a part of the mind that doesn’t die. And if it’s unhappy, it’ll keep going after something else, another life, again and again and again. But there’s another part of the mind that’s separate from desire. It’s the one thing that is not rooted in desire. And that, the Buddha says, is the only thing that will give true satisfaction. In the sense that it is a true happiness that doesn’t change. And it doesn’t harm anybody. All too often, our mistakes in trying to find happiness cause suffering not only for ourselves but also for other people. So the Buddha’s teachings are here to give us some guidance on how we can find happiness that doesn’t cause any harm. And he teaches a way that doesn’t cause harm either, a way to that happiness. At the very least, he teaches us the skills we need to decide if that’s where we want to go. This is one of the reasons we bring the mind to the present moment, to be with the breath. Because it develops all kinds of good skills. Mindfulness, the ability to keep something in mind. You have to keep remembering to stay with the breath. Alertness, the ability to see what you’re doing clearly, and also to see clearly the results that are coming from your actions. And finally, ardency, the heartfelt desire to want to do this right, to do it right. To do it well. And even though we may not be aiming at the happiness that the Buddha says is the highest, at the very least we shouldn’t aim at anything that gets in the way. So we use our mindfulness, our alertness, and our ardency to look at what we’re doing, as the Buddha teaches the path, to try to follow the path, and see if it really does lead to something that’s harmless. And if the path in itself is harmless. Because if you’re not alert, you’re not really clear on what’s happening, what you’re doing. And if you’re not mindful, you don’t remember what lessons you’ve learned from the past. And if you’re not ardent, you can’t really hope for anything to happen. Things will just kind of wander around. If you want to make this into a skill, then you have to be very observant of what you’re doing, what the results are. If the results are not good, what might you do to make them better? Because the path the Buddha lays down, even though it’s clearly marked, doesn’t fill in all the details. And each of us has our own ins and outs in our mind, based on our karma, based on our likes and dislikes. The things we’ve done in the past will have an effect on what we’re trying to do right now. And those things will differ from person to person in their details. The basic principles are all the same. You want to develop mindfulness, concentration, discernment, so you can see things clearly. Issues that are going to come up are going to require your ingenuity. That, in fact, is a large part of developing your own discernment. Let you face one problem and ask yourself, “What’s wrong here?” One, it’s important just to recognize that there are problems. Two, to look in yourself and see what resources you have in order to get past those problems. The Buddha says we have these resources within us. He can’t follow the path for us. He can give us guidelines, ask questions, and hope that we ask ourselves those questions. “What am I doing as days and nights fly past? What am I becoming as a result of what I’m doing? Is this the direction I want to go?” These are important questions to ask. Society outside doesn’t encourage them. They have all kinds of answers for you. But you have to take the time to stop and think, “Is this really where I want to go, the direction I’m taking right now?” So as we focus in on the present moment, it has implications on into the future. We’re developing the skills we need to look carefully at what we’re doing, to see these are really the desires we want to follow. Because they can’t be changed. As the Buddha said, the desires that cause suffering, as we chanted just now, are craving for sensuality, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming. Becoming is taking on an identity in a particular world of experience. In other words, if you want something, you have to think about, “Do you have the resources to get that within you? What about the world out there? Does the world out there offer the opportunity for what you want?” And that identity that you take on and the world out there that you identify with, that’s a becoming. These kinds of cravings the Buddha said, lead to suffering. But then there’s the craving, or the desire, to let go of whatever is unskillful in yourself and to develop skillful qualities in their place. That desire, the Buddha said, is part of the path. And that’s the desire he encourages us to follow. So look at your desires. How do they measure up against what the Buddha said are skillful and unskillful desires? As you try to develop skillful qualities, you will become a different person. And that question, “What am I becoming as days and nights fly past?” will be an answer you’d like to give. You’re becoming wiser. More generous, kinder, more solid inside. These are all good things to develop. These are all good directions in which to go. Because the path the Buddha teaches is one that trains our character. It’s not just a matter of memorizing things or following a particular technique. To follow something well requires some character. With any skill, there’s a certain solidity that’s required as you notice that you’re making mistakes and you’re not blown away by the mistakes. But you admit that, yes, there are mistakes, but you can learn from them. So you don’t have to repeat the mistakes again. It’s in this way that we’ve come to train our desires so that they really do lead to a happiness that’s not going to disappoint, and a happiness that’s harmless. So what the path does is it causes us to look at our desires and train them in the right direction, to a point that doesn’t require desire. That’s good in and of itself. Because what does desire imply? It implies a lack, something’s missing, something’s wrong, and we want to fix it. There’s nothing wrong with that desire, as long as you don’t have a happiness. It really is something you can depend on. What we’re learning to do is train our desire in the right direction, train that self-awareness sense of lack, so we can find a spot where there is no lack. And that’s by focusing and training the mind right here, right now. That’s what points us in the right direction. Because to see our desires, to see where they’re leading, to see where they’re causing harm and where we might change things so as not to cause harm, requires that we be really alert. We have to be really alert and mindful and hold on to that one desire to do it really well. These qualities—mindfulness, alertness, ardency—these are the ones that will see us through.

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