Time Passes

October 24, 2018

Time passes, and the question is, what are we left with after time has passed? Today is the last day of the rains retreat. For monks, this is how we measure our lifetime as monks, how many rains retreats you’ve There’s always one more rain retreat, and the question is, what do you have to show for it? Of course, the same thought applies to laypeople as well, simply that the conventions are different. But time passes. Each year gets shorter and shorter, it seems. And what do you have left? It’s good to come out to a quiet place like this to think about the quiet corner here, the place where you get out of your ordinary concerns, the responsibilities you have, and look at your life as a whole. Where is it going? There’s that reflection the Buddha has you think every day. Days and nights fly by. What am I becoming right now? What kind of person are you becoming? You become that person through your actions. You may have lots of different intentions, but the intentions that you act on, those are the ones that make you become something. So you have to stop and think. When you make a decision to do one thing over another, what’s making the decision? What’s pushing the decision? What perspective in the mind do you have where you can step back and say, “Ah, yes, this is the right thing to do,” and not only know the right thing to do, but also have the willingness and the strength to do it? It’s all too easy to lose perspective, to say, “Well, for the time being I’ll do X, and I’ll wait for something a little bit more noble later on. But right now I’ve got to take care of my job, I’ve got to take care of my family, I’ve got to take care of all these practical things.” As if the noble course of action were something impractical. The whole reason it’s noble is because it gives results that are long-lasting. So each of us has to look at him or herself and ask, “What is it in my mind that’s keeping me from doing the right thing?” Sometimes it’s simply a lack of perspective. Sometimes it’s laziness. Sometimes it’s orneriness. But you have to realize, time passes. And if you keep giving in to the unskillful voices in your mind, when will you find the time to switch around? The whole purpose of coming to this quiet corner is to learn how to have that quiet corner in your own mind. And that means you have to be extra mindful to protect that. This is where the Buddha’s original meaning of mindfulness is very important. When you see that there’s something unskillful that you haven’t let go of, you have to be very mindful to let go of it. In other words, you don’t just watch it. You have to remember, one, that it is unskillful, and two, how to get rid of it. Have you gotten rid of it in the past? What did you do then? These are good things to remember. Our ordinary life makes us remember all kinds of other things, but the real skills that we need in order to not be our own worst enemy. In the rush of daily life, those get easily forgotten. So you need this quiet corner that’s not rushed around, not pushed around by the events of the day. You need to be mindful of the fact that you’re not just watching the events of the day. You need to be mindful of the fact that you’re not just watching the events of the day. You need to be mindful of the fact that you’re not just watching the events of the day. You’ve had that much goodwill for all of us, but then the question is, how much goodwill do you have for yourself? If you really wish yourself well, you have to be more heedful about what you do and what you say and what you think. So this is one of the reasons why we meditate, is to have that strength. Once we know what the right thing is, we have the strength to do it. And you want to make sure that it does carry through in your daily life. Otherwise, you’re like the kind of person who goes down to the gym, is really strong in the gym, but then refuses to use his or her strength to help around the house. The strength is there, but it’s wasted. If you don’t meditate, there should be a sense of refreshment, a sense of well-being. It is work, but it’s pleasant work. It should be energizing work. But you also have to have the discernment to learn how to take that energy, take that strength, and use it in the right way in the course of the day. If you don’t meditate just to have a little quiet corner to escape to or to run away, and then to go running back, it’s there to give us some perspective and give us some anchor points in our life. You have to think of your day as what you do between your meditation, your form of meditation, and you try to make a continuity between each session so that by the time you arrive at the next session of meditation, you don’t have a lot of stuff to clean out. This is why we practice restraining the senses. We know that certain things are going to stir up the mind, either stir up greed or anger, or any of the other hindrances. And since you’re trying to fight the hindrances during your meditation, why not try to fight them during the day? Then you begin to realize that you have to keep watch over your senses. It’s not so much that things outside make you greedy or make you angry. Too often, the mind itself is looking for something to be greedy for, looking for something to be angry for. So restraining the senses is a kind of meditation. It’s how you carry meditation into the day. And you’re looking for whatever fetters are going to cut them up, and the way you look at things, or listen to things, or whatever. That way, part of the mind gets to stay in its quiet corner and direct things, and not get smothered up. See, we want to live in such a way that if the Buddha were actually to come and ask you, “Days and nights fly past, fly past, what are you becoming right now?” You’re going to have an answer you’d be proud to give, saying that you use his teachings that he worked so hard to set out. You’re using them for a good purpose. That’s what he’d want to hear.

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