I Will Grow Different (outdoors)

August 14, 2022

There’s a chant that we repeat almost every day. Simbe hi me piye hi manabhi na na bhavo hi na bhavo. I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and appealing to me. We repeat it every day to remind ourselves that this is a normal part of life. It happens to everyone. Wherever you’re born, there’s going to be separation. There’s separation while you’re still alive or separation when you die or when they die. You have to prepare yourself. Most of us are not prepared. Once we find something that’s really dear, we want it to last forever. We tend to forget it’s not always going to be there. That’s our first line of defense, to remind ourselves of how normal this is. We can’t let our happiness depend on relationships. We have to find a separate happiness inside. No relationship can really take all the burden of providing happiness. It places just too much of a weight on the relationship. But if you can find happiness inside, separate from the relationship, then you can enjoy the relationship, contribute to the relationship, knowing that someday it’s going to end. The contributions that you make, you want to make into good contributions. Think of them as gifts you give to the person before the person goes, before you go. If it so happens that the other person goes first, you acknowledge the fact that the person had goodness and you want to take note of that goodness. This is why we have eulogies, this is why we have remembrances. But then you also have to look into yourself to realize the extent to which you made that other person part of you. So when there’s a separation like this, you feel like part of you is gone. And that’s what you’ve got to watch out for. You have to remind yourself that there are good things in life that are still there, that that other person hasn’t taken away. So you can create a better, healthier sense of self around the things that really aren’t good. There was a case where Sariputta, who was one of the Buddha’s two top disciples, passes away, and Ananda, who was the Buddha’s attendant, took the news to the Buddha. Ananda, while he was giving the news, said to the Buddha that as soon as he got the news of Sariputta’s passing, he felt the North, South, East and West were all confused. He had lost his bearings because he’d depended so much on Sariputta’s help. And the Buddha said, “When Sariputta left, did he take virtue with him? No. Did he take concentration with him? No. Discernment? No. Release? No. Knowledge and vision of release? No.” Well, the good things in life are still there. You have to realize that the self that you had created around that relationship is not a self that you can rely on forever. We have many selves inside our self, many identities, many roles that we take on in the world. And so we have to develop a separate self, one that’s not dependent on that person or another relationship. So when they inevitably end, that self will still be there to rely on. And beyond that, we have to remind ourselves that this happens to everybody. So whatever grief you may feel can turn to compassion, as you realize that just as much as it hurts for you, it’ll hurt that much for everybody else. Many people are going on with huge wounds inside from losses they’ve suffered, and yet we don’t see them. There’s a line from Middlemarch where one of the characters says, “If you could be really sensitive to all the suffering that people have gone through, just even one squirrel’s suffering would just be too much to bear.” So think about that. Turn your grief into compassion for everybody. And then from compassion you think further. If we don’t put an end to this process, of trying to find people we love and then being separated from them, and then trying to find new ones and being separated from them, if we don’t put an end to this process, it’s just going to go on and on and on with no end in sight. Because this is true not only in the human world, it’s true in the lower realms, it’s true in the higher realms. There’s no permanent place, no permanent relationship anywhere. When you think in these ways, the emotion that gets exercised to us is a sense of dismay. In Pali it’s called samsara. It’s a sense of dismay but also something of a sense of terror, that if I don’t do something about this, it’s not going to stop. It gives a sense of urgency, which is when you start thinking about taking on the path to get out. This is why we’re sitting here with our eyes closed. Because the cause of all of this is nothing that lies outside. When the Buddha talks about stress as a noble truth, it’s not just any old stress. It’s having a right understanding of stress. That’s when it becomes a noble truth. We think stress and suffering come from things outside. Then we shouldn’t be sitting here with our eyes closed. We should be having our eyes open and running around outside trying to change things. But think about changing the world so that it’s a perfect place that doesn’t cause you suffering. It’s not the same as other people’s idea of a good world. So you get into conflict. You may think you’re straightening them out, but they don’t want to be straightened out that way. Fortunately, the causes are not outside. The causes are inside. And this is some place where you can straighten out the causes and not have to come into conflict with anyone else. You see, the suffering itself is an inner activity, the activity of clinging. The Pali word for clinging also means to feed. Your mind is feeding off the wrong things. It’s feeding off of sensory contacts, it’s feeding off of consciousness of the Self, and it’s feeding off of your intentions. If you’ve ever looked at your intentions, you realize you have them all over the place. Good, bad, indifferent. Things you want to think, you think. Things you don’t want to think, you think. Your thoughts take over. And these are the things that are causing you to suffer. You’re craving to keep on thinking in these ways. So when we meditate, we’re learning to get some control of the process. So, as the Buddha said, when you’ve meditated well, then the things you want to think, you can think. And you get a better idea of things that really are worth thinking. As for things you don’t want to think, you don’t have to think them. You’ve got that kind of control. So right now, as you’re working with the breath, you make up your mind that you’re going to stay with the breath and not let yourself get distracted by anything else outside. And then to stay with the breath, you turn the breath itself into your food. Your intention to stay with the breath is good food for the mind. And then the feeling of ease that comes when you stay calmly with the breath, watching it coming in, going out, letting it smooth out, finding what rhythm of breathing feels best right now, whether it’s going to be short or long or in-short, out-long, in-long, out-short. The sense of ease that comes when the breath feels good in the body, that’s a kind of food as well. When you’re well-fed inside, then there’s not the need to go out and feed off of whatever there is outside. Because a lot of that outside food is really undependable. It’s like walking along and picking up whatever has been thrown on the ground. Some people throw good food on the ground, but it’s pretty rare. Other people throw their garbage. Sometimes the garbage is still edible, but sometimes it’s gone rotten. And if you’re constantly looking for your happiness outside, you’re like that homeless person looking for food on the ground. Whereas if you’ve got good food inside, there’s no temptation at all to look at the ground for food. So feed yourself well right here. And when the mind is well-fed, then it’s in a better position to look and see if what the Buddha said is really true. The things that we cling to are the things that cause us suffering. There’s a passage in the Canon where a man has lost his son. He goes to the graveyard every day and cries out, “Where are you, my son? Where are you, my son?” And this keeps up for several days, until one day, on the way back from the graveyard, he stops off to see the Buddha. The Buddha says, “You look like someone who’s out of his mind. What’s happened?” And the man says, “I’ve lost my only son.” And the Buddha says, “Yes, there’s a lot of suffering that comes from those who are dear to us.” And the man argues, “No, we get joy from those who are dear to us. He’s totally blind to what he’s been doing.” So he leaves the Buddha. He happens to meet up with a bunch of gamblers. He tells them what the Buddha said, and the gambler says, “Oh, we agree with you. It’s from the people we love that we get our happiness. What is this the Buddha saying? It’s from the people we love that we get sorrow and pain.” Well, word of this reaches the palace, and Queen Mallika, who at that point is a student of the Buddha, is along with the king. The king is not a student of the Buddha. He’s heard this news of what the Buddha said, that it’s from those that we love that we get suffering and pain. So he says, “What is this Buddha of yours saying?” She says, “Well, whatever he said must be right.” He says, “What kind of person are you that you don’t think for yourself?” So he banishes her from the room. So she sends someone to the Buddha asking, “Well, what did he mean by saying it’s from those that we love that we get pain?” So the messenger goes, and the Buddha tells the messenger stories of people who go crazy over loss of a loved one, or a case where a young wife has been separated from her husband by her parents because they want to marry her to somebody else. So she sends word to the husband, “This is what my parents are doing.” So he sneaks in, kills her, and kills himself with the idea that dead they will both be together. And as the Buddha said, “This is what I meant when I said it’s from those we love that we get suffering and pain.” So the messenger goes back to the queen and tells her what the Buddha said. And instead of repeating what the Buddha said—this is an interesting point—the queen goes to the king and asks him, “You’re number one queen. If something happened to her, how would you feel?” He says, “If something happened to her, my very life would be altered.” “How about your eldest son? How about your eldest daughter? How about me? If something happened to me, would it have an effect on you?” She says, “My very life would be altered.” And then she says, “That’s what the Buddha meant when he said it’s from those we love that comes suffering and pain.” So this is the first time the king decides he wants to pay homage to the Buddha. So you think about that. We’ve been through this many, many times before. Unless we do something about it, we’re going to suffer it again many, many times. There is a greater happiness that comes from training the mind. If we weren’t there, the Buddha would have probably said, “Well, in that case, just put up with the sorrowful side of life so you can enjoy the joys.” He says, “No, there’s something that’s higher happiness that comes when you’re no longer trapped by this process of wanting to get happiness out of a situation that’s going to bring you sorrow.” So clinging to things and liking your clinging, even though the clinging itself turns out to be suffering. So when you see that your suffering comes from your clinging, that’s when you understand suffering as a noble truth and you’re ready to put the path into practice—virtue, concentration, discernment. So it can take you to the noble truth where there is no suffering at all. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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