

The Heart a Flowing Stream

THE BUDDHA ON ENDING THE ĀSAVAS

The third knowledge the Buddha gained on the night of his awakening—the knowledge that led directly to his total release—he called “knowledge of the ending of the effluents.” An effluent, *āsava*, is a tendency that flows out of the heart and mind. Because the word *āsava* is also used to describe wine made from fermented fruit, it can also be translated as “fermentation.” The āsavas that the Buddha ended were tendencies that bubbled up in the heart and intoxicated it, leading it to flow along in saṃsāra.

We often think of saṃsāra as a place, but it’s actually a process. The word *saṃsāra* itself literally means “flow,” and there’s a fairly consistent pattern of imagery in the Pali Canon that compares the repeated saṃsāra of rebirth and redeath to the flow of the currents in a river at full flood. Effluents are the springs from which those currents arise.

When the Buddha ended the effluents, he stopped the flow at the source and was freed from ever having to be born again. In fact, the first two thoughts that occurred to him on gaining awakening were: “Released!” and “Birth is ended.”

He identified three effluents in all: the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming, and the effluent of ignorance.

- Sensuality is the mind’s fascination with planning and fantasizing about sensual pleasures.
- Becoming is the act of taking on an identity in a world of experience—either in the world of the mind or in the world outside.
- Ignorance is not looking at your actions in terms of the four noble truths to see (1) which actions constitute suffering, (2) which ones cause suffering, (3) which ones cause suffering to cease, and (4) which ones take you to the point where you can do the actions that bring about that cessation.

A little reflection will show why these three tendencies would flow into rebirth:

- The desire for more sensual pleasures is often the motive force for wanting to be reborn.
- Around that desire there grows a sense of the world in which those pleasures might be found and into which you could be reborn, along with a sense of your

identity in that world, capable of attaining those pleasures. That's the beginning of becoming.

- Ignorance of the suffering involved in the process of becoming blinds you to the fact that whatever pleasures might be gained through becoming would be far outweighed by the suffering inherent in the attempt.

It's because ignorance provides the cover for you to go wholeheartedly for sensuality and becoming that it's said to be the most basic of the effluents. If it can be ended, all of them end. However, ignorance ends only when the mind fully sees things in terms of the four noble truths, and as the Buddha learned when teaching others, you can fully accept those terms only when you see "the drawbacks, degradation, and defilement in sensuality, and the rewards of renunciation" (MN 56). In other words, before you'll willingly make the effort to adopt the point of view that can see through ignorance, you have to see that it would be good to escape from sensuality. This means that all the effluents have to be attacked together for any of them to end.

One of the insights that the Buddha gained in the second knowledge on the night of his awakening—knowledge of how beings are reborn in line with their karma—was that your level of rebirth was determined not only by past karma, but also, and sometimes more forcefully, by your present karma: the choices made at the moment of death. This insight showed him that the effluents acted not only over time, but also immediately in the present moment.

He then used that insight to focus his attention on the effluents bubbling up in his mind in the immediate present. Instead of waiting for the moment of death to deal with them, he saw that they were fermenting in the mind all the time in its relationship to the world of the six senses—the five physical senses, plus the mind as the sixth. By watching how these effluents flow out of the mind and into the world, he saw not only how they originated, but also how they could be brought to an end by training the mind in the factors of the noble eightfold path. Once he had ended these effluents in relationship to the senses in the immediate present, he knew that they could no longer pose a danger at the moment of death. That's why his total release in the present moment also meant that there would be no more birth after death.

When he taught his listeners to deal with their own effluents, he had them take the same approach. Don't wait until the moment of death to do battle with all your accumulated karma from the past. Instead, learn to abandon the effluents at work in your engagement with the world of the senses right here-and-now.

Even though you won't put a stop to the effluents until the very end of the path, you can begin weakening them in the early stages of the practice. The more

you can resist the pull of their flow, the freer you'll be. That's why the Buddha left behind several sets of instructions on how to begin attacking the effluents right from the start.

Two sets in particular stand out, because they're related to two of the dimensions of right effort: (1) knowing what type of effort is appropriate for abandoning a particular unskillful mental state, and (2) knowing how to motivate yourself to *want* to abandon that state.

TYPES OF EFFORT

In MN 2, the Buddha discusses seven approaches for abandoning the effluents. These are called:

- 1) abandoning by seeing,
- 2) abandoning by restraining,
- 3) abandoning by consuming,
- 4) abandoning by tolerating,
- 5) abandoning by avoiding,
- 6) abandoning by destroying, and
- 7) abandoning by developing.

Of these approaches, the first one, *seeing*, focuses on the effluents of becoming and ignorance. The next four—*restraining*, *consuming*, *tolerating*, and *avoiding*—focus on the effluent of sensuality, while the last two—*destroying* and *developing*—relate to all three of the effluents.

The entire list is prefaced by the Buddha's observation that the effluents end only for a person who knows how to apply appropriate attention. And the explanation for each approach notes that it involves "reflecting appropriately." So appropriate attention is basic to all seven approaches.

This is why *seeing*—i.e., seeing what counts as appropriate attention and what counts as inappropriate attention—comes first. Only when you know what appropriate attention entails can you practice restraint in a skillful way.

The Buddha defines appropriate attention in terms of the questions you see as worth paying attention to. He gives a long list of questions *not* worthy of attention, and they're all framed in the terms of becoming. In other words, they're concerned with your identity and with the world in which that identity has played or will play a role. Here's the list:

“Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what was I in the past? Shall I be in the future? Shall I not be in the future? What shall I be in the future? How

shall I be in the future? Having been what, what shall I be in the future?
Or else he is inwardly perplexed about the immediate present: ‘Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where is it bound?’”

The Buddha notes that these questions aren’t worthy of attention because they lead to “a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views.” In other words, they tie you down rather than leading you to release. Prominent among the fetter of views are such views as “I have a self,” and “I have no self.” He doesn’t explain why these views are a fetter, but one reason in particular stands out: When you start taking positions like this, you get entangled with those who argue an opposing position, and you start clinging to the views for their own sake.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that the Buddha would single out the above questions as unworthy of attention. After all, questions along the lines of, “Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? How was I in the past? Where has this being come from?” were the questions that led him to incline his mind to gain his first two knowledges on the night of his awakening: knowledge of his previous births, and knowledge of how beings pass away and are reborn through their karma.

But there’s really no paradox. In stating that these questions were not objects of appropriate attention, he’s explaining why the first two knowledges, on their own, didn’t lead to release. When we compare these questions to the observations that *are* worthy of attention, we can see why. As he says, you attend appropriately when you think in these terms:

“This is stress ... This is the origination of stress ... This is the cessation of stress ... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.”

This is an expression of the four noble truths. When you identify these truths in your experience, you’re answering questions that aren’t framed in the terms of becoming. In other words, they don’t deal with such concepts as “I” or “where.” They’re phrased simply in terms of actions and results: “What is stress? What’s its cause? Can it cease? And how?” At the same time, this way of phrasing the four noble truths deals not in abstractions, but in direct observations: “this... this... this.” It was by abandoning reference to a sense of identity located in a world, and simply focusing on the causal interaction of actions as they were happening in the immediate present that the Buddha was able to bring the effluents to an end.

This means that appropriate attention means looking at actions not in terms of who’s doing them where, but simply in terms of their causes and results, and in

particular, in terms of whether they're useful in bringing suffering to an end. It also means that in the remaining approaches, "reflecting appropriately" means adopting each approach in a skillful way that actually leads to the end of suffering.

The Buddha notes that when you reflect appropriately on the four noble truths in this way, you cut the first three fetters that bind the mind to the flow of saṃsāra: self-identity view, doubt, and grasping at habits and practices. In other words, unlike the unskillful questions that entangle you in the fetter of views, the questions that underlie the four noble truths actually release you from fetters. That's why they're skillful and appropriate.

The next four approaches, as noted above, focus on the effluent of sensuality. They all follow a common pattern dictated by the role of sensual pleasure on the path. When the Buddha was trying to find the path to awakening, one of his earliest realizations was that sensuality—the fascination with indulging in fantasies about sensual pleasures—could play no role in leading to awakening. But he also found that completely denying yourself any sensual pleasures would lead literally to a dead end. Part of the middle way that he ultimately formulated was the set of principles expressed in MN 101:

You don't load yourself down unnecessarily with pain.

You don't reject pleasures that are in accord with the Dhamma.

You're careful not to be infatuated with those pleasures.

But you're willing to endure pain when you find that pursuing even seemingly innocent pleasures gives rise to unskillful qualities in the mind.

The four approaches dealing with sensuality expand on these principles. They set out standards for judging what kinds of pleasures are in accordance with the Dhamma, how not to be infatuated with those pleasures, and how to endure necessary pains. As you adopt these standards, they also sensitize you to the strength of the effluent of sensuality in the mind: When the urges in your mind run up against these standards, you get a visceral sense of how the mind flows out into the world, and how that flow needs to be brought under control if you want to stop the mind from compelling itself to suffer.

Restraining is the first of these four approaches. It refers specifically to restraint of the senses, being careful not to engage in any of the six senses in a way that would give rise to unskillful mental states. It doesn't mean not looking or listening to things at all. Instead, it means viewing your engagement with the senses as part of a causal process: what causes you to engage in the first place, and how the resulting engagement has an impact on the heart and mind.

You can ask yourself, when you look at something: Who's doing the looking? Greed? Lust? Anger? Or discernment? If unskillful mental states are flowing out your eyes, you have to develop the discernment that knows how to look at things in a way that counteracts those states. The same principle applies to all the senses. If you see something beautiful, look for its unappealing side. If you hear something that makes you angry, contemplate to see how you might not get angered by it.

You learn similar lessons from the next approach, which is called *consuming*. This refers to the way in which you use the requisites of life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. Whenever you're about to use any of them, you remind yourself of the proper attitude to have toward it so as not to excite greed or attachment around it. Then you watch over yourself as you're actually using it to make sure that no greed or attachment arises.

For example, here's how to reflect appropriately on food:

“Reflecting appropriately, he consumes alms food, not playfully, nor for intoxication, nor for putting on bulk, nor for beautification; but simply for the survival and continuance of this body, for ending its afflictions, for the support of the holy life, thinking, “Thus will I destroy old feelings (of hunger) and not create new feelings (from overeating). I will maintain myself, be blameless, and live in comfort.”

This reflection deals partly with the *amount* of food you eat: You're not trying to put on bulk, but you do want to live in comfort. Its main emphasis, though, is on your *purpose* for eating. Here again, the fact that you're setting limits on what counts as a proper attitude toward the requisite makes you sensitive to thoughts that would overflow the limits. If you notice that you are eating playfully or for the purpose of beautification, you know you're dealing with the force of sensuality as it flows out toward food. As you do what you can to keep the mind within bounds, you gain some control over the effluents that otherwise would flow freely and inundate the heart.

The next two approaches—*tolerating* and *avoiding*—form a pair, in that together they chart a middle way in approaching pain. *Tolerating* deals with your ability to recognize necessary pains and your willingness to endure them skillfully. *Avoiding* gives counsel on how not to load yourself down with troubles and pains when you don't have to.

The approach of tolerating focuses on two types of pains: sharp bodily pains and the pain of harsh, unkind words. Strangely, even though the Canon frequently speaks of the need to endure bodily pains, it gives very little practical

advice on how to go about it. For that, you have to look to the teachings of contemporary meditation masters. Ajaan Lee, for example, recommends using the breath energies of the body to dissolve patterns of tension that can build up around pains. Ajaan Maha Boowa recommends questioning the labels the mind applies to pain and that can aggravate it.

Still, the Buddha does note that the main problem with pain is not the physical pain itself, but the mind's attitude toward it. In his imagery, physical pain is like being shot by an arrow. Your unskillful reactions to physical pain are like shooting yourself with another arrow (SN 36:6). As he makes clear, the second arrow is the main problem—and it's there that you'll see the effluent of sensuality in action, as it gets frustrated with the pain.

Similarly with harsh, unkind words: As Ven. Sāriputta notes in MN 28, the ideal response to harsh words is to tell yourself that an unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear, and to leave it at that. Any urge *not* to leave it at that—to complain to yourself about the person who said the words, or about how outrageous it is to be subject to such unkind intentions, etc., etc.—you can recognize as an instance of the effluent of sensuality flooding your ears.

As for avoiding, MN 2 gives a fairly common-sense list of difficulties and dangers to avoid.

“There is the case where a monk, reflecting appropriately, avoids a wild elephant, a wild horse, a wild bull, a wild dog, a snake, a stump, a bramble patch, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, an open sewer. Reflecting appropriately, he avoids sitting in the sorts of unsuitable seats, wandering to the sorts of unsuitable habitats, and associating with the sorts of bad friends that would make his observant companions in the holy life suspect him of evil conduct.”

As the list makes clear, you're not so stupid or bullheaded in your willingness to put up with pain that you're careless about avoidable dangers. When you're heedful in avoiding external dangers, it strengthens your ability to be heedful of dangers in your own mind.

The last two approaches—*destroying* and *developing*—also form a pair in that they both deal directly with the practice of meditation. *Destroying* means doing away with unskillful mental states in general, but in particular with the three types of wrong resolve that stand in the way of practicing right mindfulness: sensuality, ill will, and harmfulness. Your practice of tolerance doesn't extend to allowing these states to move in and take over the mind. Instead, when you sense that

they've arisen, you "abandon them, destroy them, dispel them, and wipe them out of existence."

You do this by *developing* skillful mental states in their place. MN 2 focuses particularly on developing the seven factors for awakening: mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity. This list of qualities details the steps by which the practice of discernment—in the factor of analysis of qualities and the practice of "reflecting appropriately"—helps to move the mind from right mindfulness to right concentration.

Because concentration counts as a state of skillful becoming, the approaches of destroying and developing, at this level, count as a form of sublimation. In other words, they use appropriate attention to direct the effluent of becoming away from sensual thoughts and toward the more skillful non-sensual pleasure of concentration. That heightened pleasure then helps to weaken the flow of the effluent of sensuality. The resulting state of concentration also creates a space of clarity in the mind that helps to weaken the effluent of ignorance.

But the approaches of destroying and developing can then go beyond sublimation. MN 2 notes that you develop the seven factors of awakening "dependent on seclusion... dispassion... cessation, resulting in letting go." This means that you continue reflecting appropriately to develop the seclusion of concentration as far as you can take it. The greater stillness and stability of your concentration, in turn, foster even sharper discernment. You come to discern clearly the flow of becoming and ignorance that shapes the tendencies that would pull you off the path. Eventually, you begin to discern that this flow of becoming and ignorance also shapes, in an extremely subtle way, your practice of concentration and discernment. You come to see how the drawbacks of these fabricated flows outweigh the pleasures they can provide. They can give only a fabricated happiness, subject to the limitations of anything fabricated. When you realize this, you begin to sense dispassion for all things fabricated. This inclines the mind to the possibility of an unfabricated happiness, as promised in the third noble truth.

Because the flows were driven by passion, dispassion deprives them of their motive force, allowing them to cease. That's when you let go of everything fabricated, including the fabrications of the path. In so doing, you put an end to the effluent of ignorance that was driving the whole show. The mind is then totally freed, and the conditions for further rebirth are ended. The mind can no longer be forced by any conditions at all.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The seven approaches listed in MN 2, taken together, flesh out two general principles about the practice stated elsewhere in the Canon.

The first principle is the Buddha's observation in the Sutta Nipāta:

Whatever streams
there are in the world:
Their blocking is
mindfulness. Mindfulness
is their restraint, I tell you.
With discernment
they're finally stopped. — *Sn 5:1*

When the seven approaches keep the effluents in check, they count simply as a form of mindfulness, which—on its own—isn't enough to genuinely stop the effluents. Mindfulness builds a dam across the stream, but the dam could still be flooded and washed away at any time. Only when discernment, in the form of appropriate attention, brings a deep sense of dispassion toward the effluents, are the effluents stopped for good at their source.

The second principle is the Buddha's observation in AN 10:73 that the Dhamma is nourished by two things: commitment and reflection. You commit yourself to all seven approaches, and you reflect appropriately on them as you follow through with them. The commitment is what allows you to clear a space in the mind where you can become sensitive to the flow of the effluents. The reflection, when it applies the terms of the four noble truths to what you're doing, allows you to develop the dispassion that puts a stop to the flow of the effluents once and for all.

MOTIVATION

When you've trained your mind to a high level of concentration and discernment, you can clearly see, on reflection, that ending the effluents would be a good thing. The problem is, to get the mind to commit to that level of training in the first place, you need to see the benefits of putting forth the effort to arrive there. When the effluents are flowing strong—as they usually are in an ordinary mind—they tend to pull you away from wanting even to attempt the path, much less commit to it. This is because you identify their strength as *your* strength, and you tend to delight in that strength. Because you see it as yours, you don't regard it as a type of coercion. As far as you're concerned, it's how you extend your influence into the world. So the idea of abandoning that strength runs directly

counter to what the effluents keep promising. The flow of sensuality promises the delights of whatever sensual pleasures you can imagine. The flow of becoming promises you that you can create identities that can influence worlds where your desires can be fulfilled. The flow of ignorance tells you that any stress or suffering involved in sensuality and becoming either doesn't exist or, if it's too blatant to deny, that you'd be wise to accept it as part of the price you have to pay for the good things in life.

This is why so many of the Buddha's teachings focus on the many sufferings that sensuality and becoming always entail, and insist on the possibility of a happiness where there's no suffering at all. When people arrive at junctures in their lives where their suffering is obviously oppressive, they can begin to admit that what they've accepted as wisdom has actually been lying to them, and that the Buddha might be right: A happiness without suffering is a worthwhile goal.

But simply opening your heart to the Buddha's wisdom isn't enough to carry you all the way through to the higher levels of the path. You need extra encouragement.

So, to counteract whatever delight you may find in the effluents, the Buddha in AN 6:78 offers six alternative objects of delight that can provide you with pleasure and happiness in the here-and-now, and at the same time "activate the source" for your motivation to go all the way to bringing the effluents to an end. Even though all forms of delight can cause stress, and ultimately will be abandoned at the end of the path, still you first need to delight in the path and its goal so that you can get started in the right direction and carry through.

The six objects of skillful delight are:

- 1) the Dhamma,
- 2) developing,
- 3) abandoning,
- 4) seclusion,
- 5) the unafflicted, and
- 6) non-objectification.

When you find delight in these things, you counteract the mind's tendency to delight in things that would keep you flowing along in the currents of saṃsāra.

For instance, *delight in the Dhamma*: You can take delight in the fact that there is a Dhamma that explains the big issues of life: aging, illness, death, grief, and despair. It teaches that suffering can be ended through human effort. It explains how we suffer, why we suffer, and how we don't have to suffer. It gives reliable guidance in how to act, speak, and think skillfully so as to gain total

release. It reassures us that the effort put into developing skillful actions is well spent.

The Dhamma explains these issues clearly, and in an honorable way. As the Buddha said, it's admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. The words of the Dhamma are inspiring. The practice is a noble practice, one in which we engage in developing the noblest qualities of our own hearts and minds. And the end is total freedom from restrictions of any kind. It's a good Dhamma all the way through. We can take delight in that.

This delight helps to counter the tendency that prefers to delight in the idea that there are no genuinely objective standards for truth, that birth and death are all a big mystery, that right and wrong are simply a matter of different people's opinions, so there's nothing standing in the way of your doing whatever you want. Of course, if you adopt that attitude, you give your effluents a wide field in which to flow. If good and bad are simply social constructs, you're free to invent your own social constructs. No one can say definitively that you're wrong, because criticism is just a social construct, too.

But if you leave the processes of birth and death as a mystery, then you don't really know what to do to escape suffering. You have no reliable guidance for how to calculate if or how long the effects of your actions can possibly last. As the Buddha said, you're left unprotected and bewildered, and you leave unanswered the question that's our common reaction to pain: Is there anyone who knows how to bring this pain to an end?

So delight in the Dhamma helps to hold in check these dangerous attitudes that flow on, not just into saṃsāra, but into some of its worst destinations.

The next two types of delight—*delight in developing* and *delight in abandoning*—refer to the delight you take in developing skillful qualities and abandoning unskillful qualities. These are the most fundamental principles of the practice, so fundamental that they were among the first lessons the Buddha taught to his son, Rāhula, when Rāhula was still a child. As he told Rāhula, when you can see that your actions are harmless—both in the immediate present and over the long run—you should take delight in that, and keep on training. When you act in this way, you're being heedful—choosing your actions not according to whether they bring immediate pleasure, but according to whether they bring long-term welfare and happiness. As the Buddha says, your ability to choose long-term good over the short-term good, and to be happy as you make that choice is a measure of your practical discernment.

To delight in developing and in abandoning helps to counteract the tendency to delight in heedlessness, the callous part of the mind that thinks, "I don't care

what happens down the line. I want what I want right now. Thinking about the future gets in the way of my enjoying the here-and-now.” If you have no sense of heedfulness, you leave yourself unguarded, unprotected, an easy prey for your effluents.

These two objects of delight help you to find joy in committing to the path. The remaining three help guide your reflection as you commit. Each focuses on countering a specific effluent.

Delight in seclusion helps to counteract delight in the effluent of *sensuality*. When the Buddha talks of seclusion, he’s referring only tangentially to the physical seclusion that comes when you get away from other people. His main emphasis is on secluding the mind from sensuality by getting it into concentration. When you learn to appreciate the pleasure and rapture that can come when the mind is rightly concentrated in the present moment with its awareness filling the body, that offers a skillful alternative to the tendency to delight in sensual fantasies. You can see that there are better pleasures than those promised by the effluent of sensuality flowing freely through the mind. At the same time, you can anticipate how good it would be to attain the even higher level of seclusion that comes when the mind is free from the influence of all the effluents.

Delight in the unafflicted: The “unafflicted” is one of the Buddha’s names for nibbāna, highlighting the fact that nibbāna is totally devoid of the slightest limitation, constraint, discomfort, or coercion. But even prior to the experience of nibbāna, as you develop concentration to higher and higher levels, you become sensitive to how those higher levels are free from the afflictions of an unconcentrated mind and even from the refined afflictions of the lower levels of concentration. As you develop an appreciation for high levels of concentration, you come to look favorably at the prospect of total absence of affliction in nibbāna. This helps to counteract the tendency of *ignorance* to say that suffering is inevitable, and the pleasures of saṃsāra are worth whatever pains and difficulties they entail.

Delight in non-objectification: “Non-objectification” is another name for nibbāna, focused on the fact that it’s free of the disturbances that come from objectifying yourself and others. “Objectification,” as the Buddha defines it, is the type of thinking that starts with the idea, “I am the thinker.” From there you identify yourself as a being who needs to feed and so needs a certain part of the world to feed on, whether for physical food or for the food of emotions and ideas. This type of thinking, as it proliferates, leads to further becoming.

But, as the Buddha notes, objectification also leads inevitably to conflict. When you stake your claim in a world, you have to fight off other people who want to lay claim to the same parts of that world to provide themselves with the food they want.

So when you delight in non-objectification, you delight in thinking in terms that avoid that conflict. This inclines you to adopt the viewpoint of the four noble truths, with their focus on identifying what is suffering, what is the cause of suffering, what is the cessation of suffering, what is the path to the cessation. These thoughts, as we've noted, have nothing to do with objectification or the terms of becoming, and they lead to a greater happiness totally free of conflict.

As you delight in that, you call into question the side of the mind that actually enjoys conflict, that likes assuming an identity and taking a stance, laying claim to things and fighting off anyone who would dispute that claim. To delight in non-objectification is to see the downside of the desire to exert power in the world. So when you can adopt delight in non-objectification, it helps you to counteract the effluent of *becoming*.

It might seem anomalous, given that delight is listed in many discourses as a cause of suffering, that the Buddha would advocate fostering these six forms of delight as part of the path. But even though AN 6:78 is a minor discourse, its message is by no means out of line with the rest of the Canon. When we look at the Dhammapada, for instance—one of the most famous of the early Buddhist texts—we find that its verses, too, extol a similar list of objects in which a wise practitioner should delight: the Dhamma, heedfulness, harmlessness, seclusion, stilling, renunciation, what is inward, developing the mind, non-clinging, and the ending of craving.

The seeming anomaly here can be resolved by considering the difference between fabricated and unfabricated happiness. Fabricated happiness—happiness dependent on conditions—gets amplified when you talk about it in positive terms to yourself or to others. For example, when you've had a good meal, you actually derive more pleasure from it when you can exclaim about how good it was and can elaborate on why you liked it. That increased pleasure inclines you to want to have similar meals again.

In the same way, when you undertake the path, you can develop more enthusiasm for it by telling yourself how good the goal will be and how much you want to do whatever is required to get there. When the path begins to yield results in terms of the pleasures of generosity, virtue, and meditation, then the more you consciously take joy in those pleasures, the more likely you'll be to pursue the path even further. It's for this reason that the Buddha recommends that you delight in

practices that help to counteract the pull of the effluents. This is in line with what the Canon has to say about the Buddha's teaching style in general: In a typical Dhamma talk, he would not only instruct his audience, but also "urge, rouse, and encourage" them. By doing so, he was showing them how to urge, rouse, and encourage themselves.

The dynamic changes, though, when the path finally brings you to the unfabricated happiness of nibbāna. Because that happiness is not dependent on conditions, it's not affected by praise or blame—yours or anyone else's. Praise adds nothing to it; criticism takes nothing away. This is why those who have reached this attainment are said to have left delight behind—not because their senses have been dulled, but because they have no need to increase the happiness they've already found.

So, the Buddha teaches strategically, advocating delight as it is needed to arrive ultimately at an attainment where the need for delight is gone.

AGAINST THE FLOW

There's a common tendency in many circles to depict the path as one of going with the flow, trusting in the natural goodness of the forces acting in the body and mind. The tendency to like that sort of depiction, though, has its source in the effluents themselves. They prefer that the flow of the mind be portrayed as natural and innocent so that you won't try to resist them. When you go with the flow, the currents of sensuality, becoming, and ignorance have nothing to stand in their way.

The effluents may be natural, but then so is the flow of birth and death in saṃsāra, with its endless ups and downs. And the downs are far from innocent. As the Buddha noted, over the course of our long, long history of submitting to the flow, we've shed more tears than there are waters in the oceans.

In Iti 69 and Iti 109, he shows clearly his take on the currents of the mind: They're a massive river, lovely and alluring, but with dangerous waves and whirlpools, sharks and demons ready to drown you downstream. And in AN 4:5, he gives an extended image to show the best way to navigate that river. To go with the flow, he says, is to indulge in sensual passions and to do unskillful deeds. When you do that, of course, you're going to drown. To go against the flow, though, is to refrain from indulging in sensual passions and from doing unskillful deeds—even if you find it so hard to do that your face is in tears. To stand firm in the river is to have abandoned the fetters that would cause you to return to be reborn into this world. To have crossed over the river and stand on high ground is to have gained release from all fetters—a release that's totally effluent-free.

The six forms of delight the Buddha recommends in AN 6:78 are meant to foster a change of heart, helping you to see that it's worth your while to resist the flow of the river and to do your best to get to high ground. The seven approaches listed in MN 2 show you how to use mindfulness and discernment to channel those forms of delight toward that goal until you finally arrive.