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ARTICLE NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
27	DIVERSION OF INTEREST AS AN OBSTACLE TO MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS
28	THIRST AND HUNGER AS AN OBSTACLE TO MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS
29	ASSOCIATING WITH THE WISE FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS
30	HAVING PAST MERIT FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS
31	BENEFITS OF INSIGHT EVEN WHILE IN PRISON

Comments and questions are requested. These can be taken up in future Buddhist Forums conducted by QSA. Forums 3 and 4 are now proceeding. For how to join these forums, please see QSA newsletter for July 2021. Ask for a copy from infoqsa@gmail.com or see under current activities in the QSA website www.sanghaql.org

Article 27

The Path to Nibbana-a document published by QSA (as updated in 2020)

SELECTED TOPIC 152-DIVERSION OF INTEREST AS AN OBSTACLE TO MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

While meditating all kinds of thoughts come to the mind from the memory. The reason is that there is newly created room in the mind that is calmed. It is not a failure but a sign of success.

For a newcomer, the tendency of the mind is to look for an excuse to suspend the meditation and attend to that other matter that came from the memory.

For example, you might think that you forgot to check whether the front door of the house was properly closed. So, you must run back to the house to check it. Good habits can prevent this type of disturbance. Suddenly a bright idea comes to the mind. For this type of thing, it is best to have a little note pad and a pen in the pocket, and you can make a little note and forget it. You can keep a little bottle of water to sip if you become thirsty during meditation.

You might feel thirsty. It is best to finish eating and drinking, before starting meditation. You could also visit the toilet likewise.

Generally, before meditation, one needs to eliminate these real or imagined problems, and stop worrying about anything other than the meditation. Try to forget the whole world when you settle down for meditation.

A meditation session is a life-time opportunity, and nothing is worth to take the attention away.

What happened in the past, what might happen in the future, creeps into the mind when trying to meditate. As your mindfulness improves the mind will train itself to stay in the present as much as possible. In this connection, it will be useful to learn mindfulness meditation at some stage. QSA Forum 3 conducted by Venerable Brisbane Dhamma Rakkhita every other Sunday afternoon at the Sri Lanka Buddhist Monastery in Ellen Grove, Brisbane, and based on the discourse on establishment of Mindfulness, teaches development of Mindfulness in great detail. It is also on ZOOM. For the ZOOM code please ask QSA via infoqsa@gmail.com. The link will also be published in the QSA monthly newsletter.

There are many other factors that tend to break a meditation and move you away to some other matter, wisely or unwisely. Note cases like this are possible:

- 1 A party might be going on and you are to join it
- 2 A Dhamma Sermon might be going on elsewhere and you might think it is more important
- 3 A meal for the Sangha is being prepared, and your presence is important
- 4 You might feel the need to open a window to reduce warmth inside the meditation hall
- 5 You are expecting an important email, and it might have arrived

All these obligations could be good, but one can get tempted to use these as excuses to run away from the meditation.

Warning:

In day-to-day life it becomes necessary to delve into side-shows while you are doing one thing for your worldly welfare. If you get stuck in one thing, others will win in the game of competition. So, running into other matters while doing one thing, becomes necessary for worldly progress. It is part of the struggle in life.

Again, there is no contradiction here. There is a duality which we need to confront.

[Written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra]

Article 28

The Path to Nibbana-a document published by QSA (as updated in 2020)

SELECTED TOPIC 153-THIRST AND HUNGER AS AN OBSTACLE TO MEDITATION AND SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

This is another factor that tries to defeat meditation. There are real people who do suffer from thirst and hunger due to economic circumstances. Monks and nuns and people on certain precepts can experience this in trying to live within rules. Then there are well fed meditators whose minds suggest the existence of thirst and hunger as a way of escaping from meditation.

In all these circumstances, there is an answer. Plan your meals to suit the meditation and stay with those plans. The mind will then not create those excuses.

Many times, the Buddha arranged to provide food and water to intending practitioners, because he saw thirst and hunger as a deterrent. Meals for the Sangha need to be prepared on time and delivered on time. The Sangha also must heed these wholesome practices.

A meditator is advised to keep a bottle of water by the side to eliminate the need to break the meditation in walking to places. to fetch water.

Elderly meditators must not forget their medicine when coming for meditation. If it is essential to take a medicine one can keep it ready and break the meditation for a minute to take it. It is far better to have that break than to get disturbed throughout the meditation. Remember that meditation times are a little flexible and a brief failure should be alright.

Warning:

In day-to-day life if you need you may break your routine and eat or drink something. You can be relaxed about that. In the above discussion we were dealing with obstacles to meditation and spiritual practice. There is no contradiction. This is a duality in Samsara (repeated births and deaths).

[Written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra]

Article 29

Securing Worldly Happiness-based on the Great discourse on Blessings

SELECTED TOPIC 04-ASSOCIATING WITH THE WISE AND NOBLE FRIENDS FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS

This is the second factor that contributes to happiness in life as mentioned in the Great Discourse on Blessings (Maha Mangala Sutta). When this is mentioned in a Dhamma Class in Australia, young children say that it is not correct to be judgmental. This probably results from wrong or half-baked ideas expressed by primary school teachers in Australia and perhaps in other Western Countries.

What the teachers mean is that one should not judge a person on a permanent basis because of one or a few experiences. In Buddhist culture this is clearly taught. The Buddhist is expected to keep an open mind regarding an individual as there is always a possibility that things might be better in future.

The Buddha Has mentioned that even if you associate with a wise person for a whole lifetime, you might not be able to understand him or her completely. According to the teaching of constant change (anicca) no individual stays as a constant. Influenced by the environment the person keeps changing.

Another important teaching is that although you might notice that a person's behavior (thinking, words used and actions) might seem objectionable or unacceptable in regard to one aspect, yet according to other aspects that person might seem to be good. In many cases this is true.

We should not judge others permanently or fully. In a so-called bad person, we should try to see at least some good features. Our first obligation is to observe our own thinking and behavior. Because of something bad in ourselves we might be passing wrong assessments on other people.

The need for noble friends

A very important teaching is that one can progress (both in a worldly and spiritual sense) only by having a group of noble friends. Where you might go loose, the noble friends will influence you to get back on the right path. There are very many stories to support this theory. The words "Asevanaca Balanam, Panditananca Sevana" need to be fully understood. The Dhamma mentions many features of noble friends.

However, one needs to understand friends, and closely understand who they are; just by living with them might not be effectual.

Noble friends cannot be bought from the open market. The information in social media might not be helpful. The starting point is being a noble friend yourself. Once you are a noble friend to some extent, you begin to attract other noble friends.

Another easy start is to treat the Buddha as your noble friend, maintaining your respect for him. As the Buddha is not living one can turn to the Dhamma or Sangha. This is the reason why, learning about the Buddha is so important. He was an impeccable person.

Always we can look for persons from whom we can learn the Dhamma; there are many in society like that.

There is a belief that past kamma brings noble friends together. This could be happening in Buddhist Temples and Meditation Centers.

(This article was written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra)

Article 30

Securing Worldly Happiness-based on the Great discourse on Blessings

SELECTED TOPIC 05-BUILDING A BANK OF PAST MERITS FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS

This is one of the factors of blessings mentioned in the Great Discourse on Blessings (Maha Mangala Sutta). The statement is 'Pubbe ca Kata Punnata'' meaning, having acquired merits in the past.

The immediate reaction to this teaching is that there is nothing we can do if we are born without a good history of merit in the past lives. This view is not correct. Why? The past does not mean the past lives as the last second is also in the past.

Hence if you wish to build up a bank of merits, then you can go ahead from right now. That is the simple answer. In many Buddhist cultures there are many meritorious actions that anyone can perform. One such set emphasized in Theravada is given below.

How does merit accumulated give you happiness? Because of the famous law of Kamma, past actions may produce good results here and now. That is proved by present experience. If I do something bad now, there is usually a bad result following that action. If I do something good, a good result usually follows. As to when this happens, we cannot be sure.

The second stanza in the Dhammapada runs as follows:

The mind is the forerunner, the mind is the leader,
If one performs wholesome deeds with a clean and pure mind,
Whether by word or by deed,
The results of those actions,
Follow the doer like one's own shadow.

An interesting point here is that the shadow never departs you. The good that you may have done also never departs you. It is interesting that in the opposite case of bad behavior producing unbearable results, the results can be reduced or erased. These results follow the doer like the cart following the hoof of the draft animal. The cart can be destroyed unlike the shadow. Thus, we can mitigate or overcome bad kamma with good kamma, and with steadfast good behavior, render it ineffective. That is encouragement to people who have too much of suffering right now.

Ten wholesome, merit-making actions are as follows:

ENGLISH	PALI
1 Giving	Dana
2 Moral conduct	Sila
3 Meditation	Bhavana
4 Paying reverence to holy persons and elders	Apacayana
5 Service to others	Veyyavacca
6 Sharing of merit	Pattadana
7 Rejoicing in others' merit	Pattanumodana
8 Listening to the Dhamma	Dhamma Savana
9 Teaching the Dhamma	Dhamma Desana
10 Straightening out one's views	Ditthi Ujjukata

A distinctive feature of the culture in many countries like India, Sri Lanka, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand,

Laos, and Cambodia is that most people whatever the religion, practice these wholesome deeds in a marked manner. Some of these practices are not confined to Buddhism. For example, charity is widely practiced in Christian and Muslim countries.

In a recent global survey, it was claimed that Sri Lankans were the most generous people in the world. Australia is recognized for its generosity, both internally and globally. Many western countries, China and Russia have been generous in the global scene.

Action in sharing merit with ancestors is well known. It is prominent in countries like Vietnam and Japan.

Straightening one's views needs some explanation. One must continually review one's actions and try to improve them. Your views prompt your actions. Hence, Dhamma learning, and practice are so important. Advanced correction of views can be achieved through calming, mindfulness, and concentration meditation.

A stanza in the Dhammapada says that a wise man must straighten the mind, just as an arrow-maker would shape the arrow.

Guiding the mind in the right direction, is a key to worldly happiness.

It is believed that people who abound in merits are re-born as celestial beings in future births.

[This article was written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra]

Article 31

BENEFITS OF INSIGHT EVEN WHILE IN PRISON

Ajahn Brahm Quote:

“I know of a monk who was put in jail in Thailand many years ago. He was innocent.He was in jail for two years. During which time he wrote his biography. He loved that time in jail. He did not have to give any talks, nor speak to people after meals. He had clean simple food and a nice little room for himself. He said “it was wonderful to have so much freedom.”

If you want to be in the prison cell, you are free. That was a deep powerful wisdom.

It does not matter what I am doing or where I am. If I want to be there, then the mind becomes still. At times I wonder ‘why do I have to do this; this is stupid stuff. If I do that of course I suffer. So, instead I say, ‘No I want to be here’ and this gives an incredible sense of peace and freedom.

Therefore. When you are sitting in your room, and the mind is ‘t still, don’t make a problem out of it; simply say ‘I want to be here’ and then it does become still.”

When you want to be right here, right now, you are developing freedom. You are then practising the third noble truth-you are ending the craving and stopping the doer. However, if you want to be somewhere else, you are creating Dukkha. This is simply the second noble truth of the Buddha.

Every time you think, ‘I am happy to be here’ you are ending some of the coarser manifestations of suffering.

You are following the Buddha’s teaching and the third noble truth.

When you understand this stillness is the same as the mind not moving, then you understand it is the same as not wanting anything and not trying to be anywhere.

Ajahn Brahm: Freedom in the present moment

[This article has been extracted from the periodical of the Victorian Buddhist Society]

YYYY COMMENTS ON ARTICLES AND YOUR DHAMMA QUESTIONS

Readers are invited to send any comments on articles or Dhamma questions to QSA via infoqsa@gmail.com. It is possible to arrange for discussions in the future pertaining to your questions or comments.

THE END OF THE 10 PAGE QSA DHAMMA MAGAZINE FOR AUGUST 2021

Issued by the President of QSA, Reverend James Wilson

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WHO IS LIKELY TO BENEFIT**

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