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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 a recent QSA newsletter. Ask for a copy from infoqsa@gmail.com or see under current activities in the QSA website www.sanghaql.org

Article 32

TWO ASPECTS OF MINDFULNESS BY AJAHN BRAHM

Mindfulness is not being just aware of or being fully conscious of what is occurring around you. There is also the aspect of mindfulness that guides the awareness on to specific areas, remembers the instructions and initiates a response.

A wise meditator must do more than just give bare attention to whatever comes into or goes out of the mind. When wise meditators practising mindfulness observe an unwholesome state trying to 'break in' they try to stop the defilement, and if the unwholesome defilement does slip in, they try to evict it.

There are then these two aspects of mindfulness: the aspect of mindfulness of awareness and the aspect of remembering the instructions.

In the Buddhist Suttas, the same Pali word 'sati' is used for both awareness and memory. A person who has got good mindfulness is also a person who has got a good memory, because these two things go together.

Source: The Quality of Mindfulness
By Ajahn Brahm

[It is gratefully acknowledged that this article was taken from the newsletter published by the Buddhist Society of Victoria, 19 August 2021]

Aligned with the Path to Nibbana-a document published by QSA (as updated in 2020)

Article 33

TRYING TO RESEARCH EVERYTHING

AS AN OBSTACLE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS AND MEDITATION

This might be the most serious impediment to progress in meditation for certain types of individuals. The meditator is not likely to notice this phenomenon happening as one gets involved with thoughts of this nature. Someone else who hears things you ask or say, might be able to understand what is in your mind, but would be reluctant to speak out. A noble friend might help you.

One or two examples might offer some clarification on this. Suppose the meditation teacher has stated that Samadhi Bhavana (concentration meditation) could be useful in mental development, but it does not take you to enlightenment. What will your mind do in response? If you consider yourself to be foolish or ordinary, nothing bad will happen. Suppose you are conscious of your training and education, your attainments in any field, you will immediately proceed to examine the validity of the statement and not hear the rest of the teaching.

The same thing can happen while you are meditating. Semi-consciously, you will start mentally researching the validity of the teaching. Thus, the meditation gets blocked or suspended, or ineffective.

Nearly all educated people, and more so people who are academically advanced in the Buddha Dhamma, are prone to jump into this trap. The ego makes it worse.

To take another example, suppose the meditation teacher said that because of your self-idea, or belief in a soul or self-entity, you will find it hard to attain enlightenment, then the mind will try to analyse that immediately. Because of clinging to your self-idea, you cannot see the truth fully and because you do not see the truth fully, you continue with the self-concept. You start researching on how to get out of this trap. You will remember this while you are meditating and then the meditation will break down. This may not happen to an ordinary and humble person.

Warning:

In worldly life we do not take anything for granted. We keep researching until we get the best deal. This is true in buying things, selecting schools for the children, looking for a good house, looking for a job, looking for good friends, looking for even a good meditation center, or choosing subjects to study in the university. This type of research is necessary for worldly progress.

In the above discussion we considered how this researching attitude becomes an obstacle to meditation.

There is no contradiction. There is a duality, and we need to understand it.

[Written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra for the QSA Buddhist Forum 04]

Article 34

SLOTH AND TORPOR

AS AN OBSTACLE TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS AND MEDITATION

This is the mental equivalent of sleepiness, laziness, and tiredness, experienced by the body. Boredom, and a feeling of inability to make any sort of move are also shown in sloth and torpor. Whether it is physical, or mental this a common experience in sitting meditation. Those who have strong Iddhi Padas (the four psychic powers) would be able to defeat sloth and torpor.

An obvious solution is to change posture, by say switching over to walking meditation or any other type of activity meditation. Usually, we attribute sloth and torpor to sleepiness. Mental rejection of the current experience could be the real cause. It can also occur while listening to a long sermon. It is likely that mental and physical inertia occur together.

Making an effort to bring the mind back to meditation is the suggested method of getting over sloth and torpor.

Sleepiness can result from eating too much. Hence prior to meditation it is good to take a measured quantity of food.

Sloth and torpor form one of the five hindrances to spiritual advancement. Obviously, it is a hindrance to the practice of meditation. A series of actions are suggested to get over sloth and torpor.

The awakening of energy or effort to overcome sloth and torpor can be generated using techniques such as the following. You can select some of these applicable to the current situation:

- 1 Energising the current posture
- 2 Making the body erect (not couched), not head down
- 3 Opening the eyes
- 4 Drinking cold water
- 5 Washing the face
- 6 Keeping aside clothes that are too warm
- 7 Looking at the sky
- 8 Observing moving things
- 9 Doing a few stretches
- 10 Brushing one palm against the other

- 11 Massaging the knees
- 12 Activating the noting process in meditation
- 13 Examining the source of the sleepiness
- 14 Reflecting on the certainty of death
- 15 Reflecting on urgency of practising
- 16 Fruitful Dhamma conversations
- 17 Admiring your capabilities
- 18 Continuing with the meditation with all your energies (the best way)

(When nothing else can be done, just go and sleep a little)

The question has been asked why there are two mental states (cetasikas) bundled in to one hindrance. They are taken together, probably because they have similar consequences (though different origins).

By origin, they are different. The difference is explained in Abhidhamma. Sloth is caused by the weakening of effort or energy. The mathematical word inertia is akin to this. That is easy to understand. It renders the mind incapable of further movement.

Torpor is caused by holding on to a strong view. In that situation, the mind is active, but it cannot move to a new position. It is active in a limited context. But it is stuck in some position or view. That is why it cannot move. So, the result is the same. Unable to move, the mind will fall into sloth and torpor in both cases.

Compare these with two natural occurrences. An earth worm trying to rise will fall down, because it does not have the energy or strength to rise up. A tree burnt by a lightning strike is hard to cut. Again, it cannot be moved. This latter example is given in the scriptures. (See the book Basic Buddhist Psychology by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra, page 52).

When sloth and torpor are powerful subsequent impediments to meditation such as fear, doubt lose strength. It is because there is no energy to change over to other mental states.

There is a reason why sloth and torpor set in during calming (samatha) meditation. All mental activity based on the physical senses are weakened. Then sloth and torpor creep in. You can notice this in Metta meditation or Buddhanussati (contemplating the qualities of the Buddha) meditation. This type of meditation brings good kamma and in fact suppresses all five hindrances (including sloth and torpor) though temporarily. These are worth practising despite the above-mentioned weakness.

Even in insight meditation, say by walking, sloth and torpor can arise. The walking needs to be suspended, taking another posture for a short time. This is for personal safety.

In say walking meditation, at the stage where the four elements (solidity, fluidity, motion and energy) are manifested, fear and doubt may arise, because the experience might be entirely new. It is difficult to bypass these. When fear and doubt arise, you can reflect on the Buddha and Dhamma. Pay attention to the respect you have for the Buddha. You may consult a teacher.

Warning:

Even sloth and torpor are used in a worldly sense in politics, for a group to hold power for a long time. The opium trade was promoted by the British East India company in China, to perpetuate the power of Britain to control China, in the first half of the nineteenth century, while Chinese people consumed opium and literally kept sleeping. (There is information on this on the internet. Look under opium wars in China).

[Written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra for the QSA Buddhist Forum 04]

Securing Worldly Happiness-From The Great discourse on Blessings-factor 6

Article 35

SETTING ONE-SELF IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS

Primarily, each one of us has the responsibility to set ourselves in the right direction in all our actions, mental, verbal, or bodily.

This teaching has a deep spiritual meaning, and numerous practical meanings.

As human beings we keep moving. If we do not know in which direction to move, and where we are moving, our effort is lost. Hence, setting our direction is of great importance. Setting the direction is also a matter of wisdom. If you keep running around, having no idea of the direction, no useful results are possible. Understanding is also a part of setting the direction.

For success in studies, a student needs to understand the objective of his efforts, the way to achieve the objectives, wisely, and what sort of direction is profitable. Is it enough to read the text books, should notes be extracted, how are the notes to be used, is it necessary to consult the teachers, when should consultations be made, should past papers be answered, are questions to answer. Then the direction gets set. These things mean wisdom and effort.

Similar considerations apply in learning and practising sports. Just doing one thing and then another without setting the direction would be waste of time. If the direction of effort is settled, the entire effort will be useful.

In business and property matters too, there is no use doing this and that arbitrarily, without knowing where you are going. That is setting the direction.

When it comes to spiritual activities, similar principles apply. Charitable activities, development of morals and discipline, development of mind through meditation are good as religious activities. All of them become meaningful, only if you plan your actions, and wisely set the direction of intended progress. Haphazard engagements, not really knowing where you are going, will be fruitless.

The term right view (Samma Ditthi) is quite appropriate here. It is the key element in the Noble Eight-fold path. Right View is a wide topic, and we cannot do justice in a paragraph or two.

In Buddhism, right view starts with the establishment of faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The moment you have that initial faith, you begin to set the view, the direction, the understanding, and the wisdom.

With that faith, one begins to see the main teaching of the Buddha, which is trying to sort out between wholesome and unwholesome behavior, of mind, speech and body. It is called Kusala-Akusala Vibhaga.

Then you try to understand the four noble truths, suffering (dukkha), cause of suffering (craving or tanha), the possibility of ending that suffering (nirodha) and the path to be followed to end that suffering.

One then tries to test the validity of the truths, taking them as a framework, and applying them to as many experiences as you can have. This process culminates in sharpening your sense of direction, view, understanding ability and wisdom.

Securing Worldly Happiness-From The Great discourse on Blessings-factor 7

Article 36

HAVING MUCH LEARNING FOR MUNDANE HAPPINESS

Academic education is familiar to us. Schooling is compulsory. Tertiary education is popular in all countries. Thousands of educational courses in an incredible number of streams are available. When the Buddha was living, a pupil used to learn by listening to what the teacher taught. Many lived with the teacher all their student life. Things have changed now. There are millions of books available throughout the world. These can be accessed through modern mechanisms like libraries and the internet.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, learning on the internet has become popular and necessary.

In fact, there is an avalanche of information on the internet, if only one is willing to learn. The choice of subjects is very wide and often combines many fields of learning.

Prince Siddhartha was himself a person of much learning. He excelled in studies in whatever he learnt. The Buddha recommends correct learning.

The learning acquired can be used for one's own benefit, and for the benefit of others. It can be used for worldly advancement as well as spiritual advancement. However, learning can become an obstacle in spiritual advancement when an educated person thinks too much or too highly about one's education and qualifications. That is because the unguarded mind can then put on more and more coats of the ego. The ego becomes so thick, that one can end up being a fool.

There are a few questions regarding learning that should be considered before investing a massive amount of time for it. As regards mundane benefits, each individual needs to choose what he or she wishes to learn having in mind job prospects.

Learning Buddhism

Regarding religious learning, there are many things that are not obvious. Buddhists young and old often say they wish to read the original scripture in full to make sure that they understand what the Buddha taught. Reading the scriptures in full is nearly impossible because it is so vast. Some universities and some temples may have all the volumes if one likes to survey. The writer has never met anyone who had completed this task but has heard of a few people who claimed familiarity with the whole teaching.

As a practical method, the writer recommends reading a summary of the teachings. One such book is *The Manual of Buddhism* written by Venerable Narada of Sri Lanka. Through this book one can get a pointer to other reading materials, including scriptures (in Pali or English).

There must be similar books published in other countries. If one has a particular interest say in meditation, ethics, Buddhist psychology and so on, specific authors can be traced through the internet. The Buddhanet.net is one source. Metta.lk, accesstoinight.org, tripitaka.lk are other sources. Wikipedia is a useful first reference showing the way to other sources.

The website of the Queensland Sangha Association (QSA) sanghqlld.org is a small website giving information on Dhamma activities, and a limited amount of Dhamma. QSA runs educational courses in Buddhist Chaplaincy, and Buddhist Forums regularly. You can ask for discussions on specific Dhamma topics on Forum 4. Forums 3 and 4 mostly relate to the Path to Nibbana. Worldly aspects of the Dhamma are examined in Forum 5. All these are conducted on the internet using ZOOM.

Everyone has a certain level of understanding of the Dhamma. One needs to choose the facility that connects with the current level of understanding. It must not be too high (boring) and not too low. The best thing is to try and see.

Common problems experienced in learning Buddhism

Some common problems are discussed here in the hope that efficacy and efficiency would be achieved in learning Buddhism.

1 The tendency to check every word and phrase in the scriptures hoping to arrive at the true meaning intended by the Buddha. 2500 years have passed since the demise of the Buddha. There is no one to give us an answer to this problem. If this is an academic pursuit, that is a different matter. Consider the cost benefit ratio of this type of study.

2 Some of us feel that the contents of the scriptures are not suitable for this age. The opposite is probably true. Now is the time for his great teachings to be practised.

3 Educated people complain that in some discourses the Buddha has said one thing, and in another he has said a different thing. It may well be, as these are records mostly of conversations. Each had to be taught in a way most suitable to him or her. The principles are yet the same.

4 A few have discovered that there are lots of dualities in the teaching. That is natural. Some people want to happily live birth after birth. Some others want

to bring it to an end. Hence, the same Dhamma has to be seen in two perspectives. Mara Pakshika Dhammas (factors that negate meditation) have one connotation in examining meditation, and quite the opposite in examining mundane success. There is nothing surprising, as this is a duality.

5 Some monks claim that there are too many shortcomings in the scriptures. One example cited was that the first discourse of the Buddha is wrongly recorded. It is suggested that if you get an idea like this you need to put it for the consideration of the Sangha, before making public statements.

6 There are teacher-monks who say all teachers of the Dhamma, and meditation are mistaken. So, the suggestion is that only they are correct. The very idea appears to be stupid. Be wary of this type of teacher.

[Written by Rahubadde Sarath-Chandra for QSA Buddhist Forum 05]

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 11 PAGE QSA DHAMMA MAGAZINE FOR SEPTEMBER 2021

Issued by the President of QSA, Reverend James Wilson

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