

## *A Mind Without Inertia*

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The texts tell us that when the Buddha was newly awakened, he surveyed the world. On the one hand, he saw how everyone was aflame with passion, aversion, and delusion, burning from these things, and he felt compassion. But then he reflected on the Dhamma he had discovered. He was struck by how much it went against what people would want to hear, how subtle it was, how hard it would be for them to understand. He almost gave up on the idea of teaching. It was only after a Brahma's invitation—and the Buddha's own reflection that there would be people who would understand—that he taught.

Notice the dynamic there. There was the compassion, but there was also the realization that it was going to be very difficult. He needed to be convinced that the effort was worthwhile. That was why he taught.

One of the main problems he faced was that the fire burning away in our minds is something we really like—in particular the fire of passion. When the Buddha says that we're attached to sensuality, it's not so much sensual *things* that we're attached to. We're attached to passion for sensual *thoughts*, our obsession with sensual thoughts. We love to think about sensual pleasures. If we can't get one sensual pleasure, well, we're happy to think about another one. But we're really attached to the thinking, even though it makes us suffer. We think of passion as a good thing. A lot of people say, how could you live without passion?

Think about that for a minute. What does that mean? We need the oomph of passion to overcome an awful lot of inertia. To live is to struggle. We have to feed; we have to provide for the needs of the body. This is one the reasons why we're taught to repeat the contemplation of the requisites every evening: We have this need for food, clothing, shelter, medicine. If the body were perfectly complete, we wouldn't need these things. But we're born with a big lack, a whole flurry of needs. Our parents provide for us when we're young, but there comes a point where we have to provide for ourselves. And it's not easy.

And it's not just our own effort that goes into providing for ourselves. There's a lot of suffering on the part of other people, other beings, that goes into the fact that we need food to eat. Even if we were all vegetarians, farmers would still have to work at growing the food, transport workers would still have to bring the food from the farm to market, people would still work in the market, people would still have to cook: All these people would be involved in a lot of effort.

This holds not just for food, but also for clothing, shelter, medicine. There's a long chain of suffering that goes into providing these things. Yet even when the body is fully provided with these things, it's still full of aches and pains. The pains of hunger hit every day, and things get worse as you get older. Things break down without asking your permission or giving advanced warning. This part begins to wear down. That part begins to wear down. You find yourself with less and less to work with. It gets harder and harder to be up and running. To get over the barrier of that inertia takes a fair amount of passion, which is why we see passion as a good thing. But it's a fire that keeps burning away.

The Buddha had a twofold solution to all of this. One is to direct the passion in a skillful direction, learning to get the mind motivated for things that really are helpful, that really do lead to a truly lasting happiness. For the most part, our passions are totally misguided. So the Buddha said to focus your passion in the direction of the Dhamma. Find the happiness that comes from generosity, the happiness that comes from virtue, from being principled in your behavior, and the happiness that comes from meditation. He compares these things to food—and particularly the sense of wellbeing, rapture, and refreshment that come from getting the mind into a good strong concentration. That's your food and nourishment on the path. It gives you energy. At the same time, his various teachings on the things that can be attained as we practice provide the

motivation that gives you the passion for the Dhamma, that helps overcome the inertia that otherwise would keep you from practicing.

Beyond that, the Buddha's ultimate solution to the problem is to totally get rid of that inertia, the baggage that weighs the mind down, that we have to fight against in order to accomplish anything. That's why he has us look at our attachments. The Pali word, *upadhi*, means baggage, and it derives from a term that nomads would use for all their tents and food and all their other belongings that they would pack on their horses when they picked up and moved on. All your mental belongings are called *upadhi*: the baggage you carry around with you, the extra weight that creates that dead sense of inertia.

This is why we have to look very carefully into the mind, why we practice concentration to give the mind a place where it can see very clearly the steps by which it functions, by which it creates these burdens, this massive load of baggage it's holding onto. Your greed, your aversion, and your delusion, identifying with your body, identifying with your feelings, your perceptions, your thought fabrications, even with acts of consciousness: These things weigh the mind down if you hold on to them.

This is the Buddha's ultimate mode of attack when you see the mind holding onto something. The phrase, "holding on," here, is metaphorical. The mind doesn't have hands that grab things, but it has habits that it keeps repeating over and over again. The places it goes to for its happiness, the things it does again and again and again—partly because it doesn't know any better, partly because it's habitual: Those repeated actions are your attachments. To repeat them is to hold on to them. When we begin to pry into our attachments, we begin to see what creates the mind's inertia. We also see how we can lighten the mind by learning how not to keep going after the ideas that weigh us down, that keep us back, or ways of functioning that keep us back. We let these things go by seeing that they're not worth the bother. They may provide a little pleasure, but that pleasure doesn't compare with the stress and pain they cause. That's why the Buddha has you focus on stress—in Ajaan Maha Boowa's words, the squeeze they put on the mind. They're dead weight on the mind. When you decide you'd rather let them go, the mind gets lighter and lighter. As a result, it has less and less need for passion, because there's less and less inertia for it to overcome.

To really comprehend the Buddha's teachings, to appreciate them, you have to think outside the box. When the Buddha says that the mind in nibbana no longer has to feed, it doesn't correspond to our ordinary ideas about pleasure and happiness. Our habitual way of looking for happiness is to keep feeding on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, ideas, relationships, intentions. And so when he talks about the mind not feeding, it sounds like it's being starved. What's actually happening is that the mind has arrived at such a strong place that it doesn't need to feed anymore.

The same with passion: We think a life without passion would be dead and dull because all we know is the inertia of the mind that, if it can't stir up passion, can't do anything. That, in our eyes, is a dead mind. But the Buddha was aware of a state of mind that doesn't have that inertia, that doesn't have that dead weight, and so it can do the wise thing, the helpful thing, the skillful thing, the compassionate thing, with no need for any passion to spur it on.

As we're practicing, we have to bring passion to the practice because the mind still has its baggage, a lot of resistance that we have to overcome. That's why the Buddha describes passion for the Dhamma as a good thing on the path. When you find that your efforts are getting slack, you do what you can to remind yourself of why you're here practicing, what the alternative would be if there were no way of training the mind to free it from its burdens, to free it from its fires of passion, aversion, and delusion, the fevers that inflame the mind. By keeping yourself motivated in this way, you use the passion for the Dhamma to replace your other passions, to keep yourself on the path. As you become more and more passionately engaged in the Dhamma, you can see more and more clearly exactly where you've been weighing yourself down. You can drop all the weight. It's like those old balloons that people used to travel in. They'd have big bags full of weights and when the balloon was ready to go up, they'd drop the weights, drop the weights, and the balloon would rise higher and higher.

The same with the practice: As the mind gets lighter and lighter, your passion gets more refined, and ultimately it's totally weightless, totally free of inertia. That's when you no longer need the passion.

It's good to remember that there are a lot of things we value in life because of a lack. We value food because we feel hungry. We value passion because it helps us to overcome our inertia. But when the mind no longer needs to feed on things, it's totally weightless. It looks at food and feels no inclination, for it doesn't need it anymore. It looks at passion and sees it as the Buddha did: simply as a fever, from which he was glad to be freed.