Beginning the Rains

July 11, 2025

Tonight we begin the rains. For three months the monks will stay here, make a determination that they will greet dawn here in the monastery every day until the full moon in October. And it’s usually a time to determine other things as well. You’re going to be living settled in. We’re living here as a group. You can look at your practice and see where it’s lacking and ask yourself, “What can I do to bring things up to snuff, bring things up to a higher level?” Work with your strengths to strengthen your weaknesses, your weak points. This is an individual matter. We can’t force people to make determinations like this. If you see this as a good time to practice something new, something that will stretch you, not to the point of breaking. Think of what the Buddha said about a good determination. It has four qualities. The first is discernment. You determine on something good to do, based on what you know will be beneficial, will be possible. But at the same time, it will stretch you. You’re going to be discerning in your goal, and discerning in how you go about it. That requires three other qualities. The first is truthfulness. How you stick to something. You’ve made up your mind you’re going to do it, and you really are honest and sticking to it. You don’t make excuses, saying, “Well, I can’t do that now. I can’t do this now.” As Jhammahambhava talks about, being with the Jhamman, and seeing his fellow monks making determinations at the beginning of the rains, and then one by one by one, dropping away, making excuses, made him more determined that he was going to stick with his determinations. He’s going to be true to what he had made up his mind to do. This quality of truthfulness is an important part of the practice. It’s not just saying true things. But it’s also being true to the practice. The third quality is relinquishment. There are things you’re going to have to give up. So be prepared for that. And be prepared for the part of the mind that will whine and complain. I’m trying to see relinquishment not as deprivation, but as a trade-off. You’re not letting go of something that’s keeping you down. You’re not letting go of something that you really need. As meditators, as monks, we should think that we’re traveling lightly. We’re going on a camping trip, and you’re going to be carrying on your back all the things you need. You’re very careful not to take anything that’s unnecessary. I should have the same attitude towards you. The fourth quality is your defilements. Each defilement weighs you down. It promises you all kinds of rewards. And sometimes it will actually deliver a little bit. But a lot of times the rewards don’t come. Or if they do come, they don’t last. So why are you packing that? The fourth quality is calm. You keep your mind calm as you have to stick with things that are difficult. You keep your mind calm as you have to let go of things that are difficult to let go of. This is the true role of equanimity in the practice. Not that you’re aquanimous about whether you’re going to fail or succeed. You’re very much determined that you do want to succeed in this determination. But when there are setbacks, you don’t let them wound you. You don’t get worked up about them. You find some way around them. So it’s equanimity in the service of your truthfulness, in the service of your relinquishment. That’s the right attitude to have to your determinations. What you have to think about as we’re living together here is that we have to learn how to live in harmony. The Buddha talks about seclusion as an ideal environment for the practice. But then he also prescribes his periods of living together. He must have seen that there was a benefit from living together, if you lived together wisely. Living together is one that you’re generous with one another. Whatever you have, you’re willing to share. Two, you speak kind words to one another. If there’s any need for criticism, you learn how to deliver it with respect. Try to find the right place and the right words. So even though the criticism may be heavy or harsh, deliver it in a way that shows that you still respect the person. That makes it a lot easier to take. The third quality is you look for ways to be of genuine benefit to others. Otherwise you don’t just talk them up. You don’t do things just for show. You ask, “What does this person really need? What can I do to help?” That kind of help really goes to the heart. It shows that you put in some thought. And you’re not just spending all your time with social grease. Because too much grease can muck up the works. And finally, you’re consistent. Years back I was reading an advice column, and the person giving advice was saying, “If you’re going to help other people, don’t be very consistent in it. Don’t be reliable. Do it sometimes, but don’t do it other times. That way you’ll be appreciated.” Which shows that people who give advice don’t have to pass a test. They don’t have to be qualified. Because they’re helping other people simply to be appreciated. That’s the wrong attitude. You want to be consistent in your help. You want to be reliable. When we can rely on one another, it makes life a lot easier and a lot more pleasant to be around one another. Consistency also has another meaning, that your treatment of others is consistent with their status. In other words, those who deserve special respect, the elders of the Sangha, those who do work as sages, the Sangha officials, they’re making sacrifices. So you’re trying to make your treatment in line and consistent with their status. When we think in these ways, act in these ways, then even though we’re living together and it’s not as quiet as it would be if there were only one or two of us here, still it’s a conducive environment for the practice. You look at the culture outside us. And it’s the exact opposite. Instead of being generous, all we see are people who are glorified for taking, taking, taking from others. People who have a lot take from those who don’t have much at all. And when they speak about this, they speak in a very callous way, demeaning, insulting. The words are not… endearing, as the Buddha would say. Instead of providing genuine help, they actually get in the way of people. It seems like they’d like everybody to die. And their help is inconsistent. It’s arbitrary. They take this and take that. They don’t treat human beings like human beings anymore. This is the world in which we live out there. We don’t want those attitudes to come into our community here. We want to show that it is possible to live in line with the Buddhist principles and to live well, i.e. to live in a way that’s conducive to our own practices. So as we approach this determination to stay for the rains, it’s good to keep these things in mind. So this custom of living together, living in a settled place, will bear its benefits. So at the end of the rains, when people can go traveling other places, they can take good things with them. In the old days, this was how you proved yourself, as among your ability to live in an harmonious group. At the end of the rains, it would be the opportunity for people to make accusations about you. They’d notice that you had broken a rule, if they suspected it, if they saw it, if they heard it. And there was the one day out of the year where you would have to allow people to make accusations. And so if you had lived with a reputable community, gone through the three months without any accusations like that at the end, there was kind of a seal of approval, a seal of quality. So this is a time to benefit from the good examples of others. And it’s good to allow yourself to be criticized by others. Don’t wait for the last day. Because all too often our defilements are things that we can’t see. We can benefit from the eyes of others. Listen to what they see. And our time together will be a benefit for all concerned.

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