

Trust in Heedfulness

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The Buddha gives a list of five qualities that give strength to the mind. The list starts with conviction. And as the Buddha says frequently, the various members of the list—starting with conviction on through persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment—are developed through heedfulness. Now, this may seem a strange combination: Conviction, on the one hand, implies trust; and heedfulness implies wariness. But if you look carefully at what heedfulness means, it means that you believe that your actions do make a difference. Otherwise, there'd be no need to be heedful. In other words, if your actions did not make a difference, then it wouldn't matter how careful you were or how careless you were; how much you paid attention or how much you didn't pay attention. Everything would just happen in accordance with some outside force. So your basic trust is your trust in the power of action; your trust that through your actions you can see the difference between what would be careless behavior and what would be careful behavior; what's more likely to lead you to happiness and what's less likely; and then your trust that you can change what you're doing if it's leading to suffering or harm.

Now, the problem is that when you talk about your abilities and your desires, you realize that there are many “you's” in there. It's not the case that you're the person you can trust, and everybody outside is somebody to be suspicious of. There are members of your inner committee who are trustworthy and other members who are not—just as outside, there are people who are trustworthy and people who are not. You need to learn how to combine the inner trustworthy members with the outer trustworthy people, to find a happiness that really does satisfy.

Because a lot of what the world has to say is that there is no satisfaction, or no genuine satisfaction. This ranges everywhere from popular culture even to modern philosophy, when they say that the self is divided. You can't even trust inside you who is really you and who is an outside force. Given all the influences that society has on you, when you come up with an idea you can't really know for sure if it's your idea or just outside values speaking inside your mind. And as for the possibility of sorting these things out or finding a true way of finding a true happiness, they're pretty skeptical about that.

Now, the Buddha cuts through all that skepticism by saying that it's possible—when the mind is trained, when you've developed your powers of mindfulness,

concentration, and discernment— to start seeing which actions really lead to suffering and which ones don't. Because there's one thing that's not really culturally conditioned—and that's your own experience of pain and suffering. There is an extent to which you learn how to put up with certain kinds of suffering as inevitable, and that's culturally conditioned. And of course, the mind has its ways of lying to itself about where pleasure lies and where it doesn't lie —“lying” in both senses of the word: where it's located, and also where it deceives you. But it is possible to train the mind to get clear about these things.

That's what the trust in heedfulness is, or the conviction in heedfulness—that you can develop these powers, you can learn how to act in such a way that you can trust yourself more and more. You can trust your abilities to figure out what your actions are and what the results are, how they're connected, and which actions give rise to better results than others. This is why we meditate—to develop those powers. So it's not a matter of you versus the system outside, where you are trustworthy and the system outside is not. Rather, it's learning how to sort out inside you which perceptions and which thought constructs are actually more trustworthy than others.

And you can test them, if you get really clear on what you're doing and what the results of your actions are—in other words, if you're really alert. Those instructions that the Buddha gave to Rahula—even though he gave them to a seven-year-old child—underlie everything else that the Buddha taught. This is part of the Buddha's genius. He knew how to boil things down to the very essentials when he was talking to children. It's always important that we learn that we've not gone beyond the lessons he gave to Rahula, that these are lessons we always have to apply.

So what we're doing as we practice is making ourselves more trustworthy—learning how to sort out inside ourselves: which ideas, which attitudes, which perceptions we really can rely on.

This is why we're developing mindfulness, we're developing concentration, we're developing discernment, as we practice. We're doing this on the basis of heedfulness, because we realize that the more mindful you are, the more you'll be able to remember what you did, and when the result of that action comes out, you'll be able to see the connection. Together with mindfulness, of course, goes alertness: You notice exactly what you're doing. And when the results come, you're really clear about what's actually happening, what you're actually experiencing.

The concentration helps you stay focused and not wander off, so that you can really follow one thread of connections, as the connections go through your life.

You can see that, yes, this really does connect up with that. Because as Ajaan Lee once said, we can see results and we can also see causes, but if we don't make the connections between them we don't really have any discernment. And it's the discernment that allows us to learn, so that we can realize, "Okay, I did that and it led to this bad result, so I don't want to repeat that." "I did this and it led to a good result, so I want to repeat that." Then you remember that. That's how mindfulness works together with discernment.

It's a common phrase in the teachings of a lot of the Thai ajaans: mindfulness and discernment. There is a term in Thai, *satipañña*, which literally means mindfulness-discernment, but idiomatically means intelligence. But it's not just intelligence in the terms of book learning. It's the intelligence that comes when you see connections and you learn how to remember them; you don't forget them. One of the stupidest things we do is that we learn important lessons and then we just let them blur away. We don't really apply them. Or we apply them in one area of life but we neglect to apply them everywhere they're relevant. This is why the training is *not* just a matter of sitting here with your eyes closed. It's the way you conduct your life, all the time.

As you develop these qualities, you find that heedfulness really does make a difference in your life, that the trust you put in your ability to choose your actions and to learn from your actions is well placed. Because that's the other implication of heedfulness: that we can learn. We have this ability to notice what we're doing and see the results that come out—the ability to see patterns. We can then change our ways, based on our knowledge of those patterns.

So heedfulness, even though it does imply an element of wariness, also requires trust: trust in your ability to know what you're doing, trust in your ability to choose what you do, and trust in your ability to learn, so that you can start sorting out all those different members of the committee inside and find out which ones really can be trusted and which ones can't. And sorting out your relationships with the people outside: which people are good to hang around with and which ones are not; which people you can trust and which ones you can't. The more you learn how to genuinely develop yourself as a trustworthy person, the more you're going to pick up on who outside is trustworthy as well.

So it's a gradual process of focusing in, focusing in. In the beginning, you may not be too sure, "Well, can I really trust this person or can I not?" "How about inside? Which voices inside can I trust and which ones can I not?" There's no absolute guarantee from the beginning. But as you really focus on this task—and this is where the ardency and the persistence come into the practice, as strengthening factors, based on heedfulness—the clearer the focus becomes. And

you really see that it is possible to satisfy your most important desire, which is the desire for a harmless happiness that doesn't change.

Almost every other account you read in modern psychology, whether the desire is essentially sexual or whether it's caused by socialization or whatever the issue is, the idea of having a totally true and satisfying attainment of what you desire is always viewed as an impossibility. But the Buddha said, "No, it is possible to find a true happiness that's totally satisfying." If you have conviction in that principle and you're heedful at the same time, you develop the strength of mind that's needed in order to reach that goal.

So try to keep these points in mind. That way, you can sort out what you're doing as you're meditating, and have a clear idea of what you're trying to do and where it's going to go.

Knowing that much helps to answer a lot of questions right there