

## *Head, Heart, & Gut*

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As the Buddha says, suffering is caused by three kinds of craving: craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for not becoming. A lot of people jump from that statement to a much bigger generalization: that all desire is bad, which is not the case. The path to the end of suffering also includes desire. It's part of right effort.

Our problem is that our desires tend to go in conflicting directions. One minute, you may want to meditate. Another minute, you may want to do something else totally opposed to meditation. And it's back and forth like this. With all this back and forth, especially when we find ourselves in a society that is not at all favorably inclined to the practice, it's easy to see why the practice doesn't go anywhere for a lot of people.

One of the things you notice about the teachings of the ajaans, especially when they talk about their life stories, is how much determination played a part in their practice. You read Ajaan Lee's autobiography, and he talks a lot about making vows. When Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about his life story, he talks about how seriously he took his vows.

Determination is a strong desire to get all your other desires into line so that the desires you act on all lead in the direction you want them to go. In other words, you give priority to some desires and push other desires out of the way. And you try to do it in a systematic way. Here our desire is to put an end to suffering. We want to encourage that desire and strengthen it so that it really can take priority over desires going in other directions.

The Buddha talks about four types of determination. One is not to neglect discernment. Another is to guard the truth. A third is to be devoted to relinquishment. And the fourth is to train only for calm. It's good to think about all four of those as we practice.

First, not neglecting discernment: How do you not neglect discernment? Discernment has two sides, just as our mind has two sides. In English, we tend to make a sharp distinction between the mind and the heart. But in Pali, they're one word, *citta*, which covers both sides. Discernment on the head side, on the mind side, is an understanding of cause and effect, realizing that certain actions lead to certain kinds of results. Regardless of whether you want them to lead to those results, it's just the way things are.

Actions based on greed, aversion, and delusion are going to cause suffering. Actions based on the lack of greed, lack of aversion, lack of delusion can lead away

from suffering. That's one of the basic principles of causality. In fact, causality is so central to the Buddha's awakening that when he gave the very shortest description of what he awakened to, it was a causal principle: "When this is, that is. When this isn't, that isn't. From the arising of this, comes the arising of that. From the passing away of this, comes the passing away of that." That was his shortest synopsis of his awakening. And there's that case of Venerable Sariputta when he gained the Dhamma eye. It was simply from hearing about cause and effect as taught by the Buddha—a short verse.

So that's the head side to discernment, when you have to realize certain things lead to certain results and they don't play favorites.

The heart side is the desire for true happiness—a happiness that doesn't change and doesn't harm anybody. A lot of the Buddha's discernment is putting those two together, trying to arrange that your actions do lead to that true happiness. That's the kind of discernment you want to have in your determination: the discernment that, on the one hand, admits causality, so that when you do something unskillful, you're not surprised by bad results; and, on the other hand, also believes it is possible to do something skillful to get good results—so good that they can put an end to suffering.

You always want to keep that in mind because so much of society says, "No. An end to suffering is impossible. Content yourself with what we're selling you." The Buddha's there to remind you that the human mind is capable of more. The human heart is capable of more. Why sell yourself short?

This is what it means not to neglect discernment.

As for guarding the truth and being devoted to relinquishment, one of the functions of discernment is to realize that certain actions that you like to do are going to lead to suffering. Other actions that you don't like to do are going to lead to the end of suffering. You have to be able to talk yourself into doing the things you don't like to do that lead away from suffering and talk yourself out of doing the things that you like to do that will lead to suffering.

In other words, you have to think strategically. You have to know how to psyche yourself out. We tend to think that Buddhist wisdom or Buddhist discernment has to do with very abstract principles. But the basic principle is this: knowing how to psyche yourself out, knowing how to make yourself want to do what will be skillful even if the mind is reluctant, and making yourself *not* want to do things that you've liked to do in the past that have led to trouble or will lead to trouble if you do them again.

So truth in this case means being true to your original determination; relinquishment means giving up the things that get in the way. And your

discernment is important in both, but particularly with the relinquishment. There are a lot of things we've got to give up in life if we really want to find a true happiness inside. And the mind all too often focuses on seeing this as a deprivation. You hear the word "renunciation," and you think of being imprisoned, starving. But it's better to see it as a trade, and it's a trade up. We're trading things of lesser worth for things of greater worth.

There's that passage in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says that if you see a greater happiness that comes from forsaking a lesser happiness, then if you're wise you'll be willing to forsake the lesser happiness for the sake of the greater happiness. There was a British translator one time who translated that verse and added in a footnote that this couldn't possibly be the meaning of the verse. It must mean something else because it's such an obvious principle: Why do we need the Buddha to tell us this? Well, it may be obvious, but it's not necessarily the way we all act. That's because, in addition to our head and our heart, we have our gut—the part of the body that wants pleasure right away, immediately, and puts you into a bad mood very easily or a good mood very easily. But it doesn't listen to reason, or it takes a while to listen to reason.

So you've got to learn how to outsmart it and how not to be affected by it. Otherwise you're like that little animal, the sea squirt. Basically, it's just a digestive tract with a little brain. Once it's born, it starts drifting around in the ocean currents. Finally, when it finds a spot where the food is good, it latches on. Then the first thing it does after it latches on is that it digests its brain, just to show who's in charge. If you let your hungers be in charge, that's what happens. They digest your brain. So you've got to get your head and your heart working together so you can learn not to be fooled by the push to gain immediate gratification. You've got to see the long term.

So "truth" here means being true to your original decision that you want a higher happiness. And relinquishment means letting go of everything that gets in the way. And use your discernment to help in both cases.

The final determination is to train only for calm. In other words, that's your main goal. But calm is also part of the path: keeping your mind calm and getting it into concentration so that when the going gets tough, you're not surrounded only by tough options. A sense of well-being that you can develop, as you get the mind into concentration, can give you a place to stay where you have a sense of strength, where you can withstand the parts of the mind that get upset by having to give up this or give up that, and withstand parts of the mind that are lazy when you say, "I've got to do this. But gee, I really don't want to."

If you get worked up about how much has to be done, or how much has to be given up, it's going to be really difficult to practice. But you learn how to remind yourself that the things you have to give up are worth a lot less than the things you're going to gain. Now, until you see some results in the practice, it's going to require some conviction. So you've got to learn how to talk to yourself, and this is where the head and the heart come in.

When you feel like giving up, the Buddha says to remind yourself that you got on to this path because you wanted to put an end to suffering. If you feel like giving up, have you decided you want to suffer a lot more? Do you not love yourself? In other words, you find ways of calming the mind so that it can put up with the difficulties of the path. You can endure them without a sense that they're a hardship. You want to have a sense that they're an opportunity, a good opportunity.

The path opens doors. When you can think in those terms, then it's easy to maintain your calm, to be patient and equanimous. You're patient with the difficulties—the sore knees and the sore backs—and the frustrated desires, and equanimous when you think about how long it's going to take. That's where it's helpful to think of how long samsara is if you *don't* practice. So you get your mind calm through equanimity and patience or endurance, again using your discernment. The discernment functions in all these determinations so that you can straighten out your desires.

It's fortunate that our desires are not just brute desires. They have their reasons. They do want happiness. They have a concept of what happiness is and how it can be brought about. That's how you can reason with them. That's how your discernment can overcome the desires that simply say, "I want what I want right now, and I don't want to hear any comments on it from anybody." If you're insistent enough and clear enough in your understanding about how true happiness can be found—and how much you want the real thing and not just passing pleasures—you can talk to your desires. You can reason with them. After all, you're still working for happiness. You're not telling them that happiness is bad, or that you have to sacrifice your well-being for the well-being of others.

In the Buddha's point of view, genuine well-being is something that, as you work for your true well-being, is going to help others. There's a lot less conflict between your well-being and the well-being of others than you may have thought. He's also not saying that the search for happiness is a bad thing. After all, look at what he did. He spent all his life looking for true happiness and then, once he found it, teaching everybody how to do it—how they could find it as well.

So as we practice, we're going to be working with our desires, learning how to reason with them to convince them we're all in same boat in the sense that we all want happiness. It's just that some desires are really confused. And fortunately, they can be taught. But it's up to you to want strongly enough to teach them and to keep that goal in mind. This is another meaning of not neglecting discernment. When the Buddha talks about these four determinations, the highest discernment, he says, is the discernment that sees the end of suffering. So you want to always keep in mind that it is possible to totally put an end to suffering.

We live in a world where that's possible. A lot of people in the world want to say, "Oh, that's not possible," but you don't have to listen to them. Listen to the people who found the way. Don't neglect what they have to say.