

## *Daily-Life Dhamma*

*October 12, 2019*

There are times when we have so many responsibilities that the responsibilities get to us. All we can think about is how much we'd like to be free from them, go off, and be alone. And yet we can't. The responsibilities are there. At times like that, it's good to remember there's a lot of Dhamma to be learned by meeting your responsibilities. And it's good Dhamma to get you ready for the times when you finally *do* have some free time to get off and be by yourself. Otherwise, you get off by yourself and things just fall apart. You can't handle the seclusion because seclusion requires a lot of strength. So these are strengths to be developed here and now, in the midst of your responsibilities, both for the sake of here and now, and for the sake of your practice when the responsibilities have passed.

There's a list in the Canon with four members. The list doesn't have a name, and it appears in a very strange story. The Buddha's staying in a shrine, and the spirit of the shrine comes down and orders him out of the shrine. So the Buddha goes out. Then the spirit says, "Okay, come back in." The Buddha comes back in. This happens two more times. The Buddha comes back in for the third time and the spirit orders him out for the fourth time. And the Buddha says, "No, I'm not going to go. I'm going to stay right here." The spirit says, "Okay, I'm going to ask you some questions. If you can't answer them, I'm going to grab you by the feet and throw you across the Ganges and split your head open." The Buddha says, "Okay, try."

The spirit asks him some questions and one of the final ones is, "What is the best set of Dhammas to know?" The Buddha answers with four: truth, self-control, stamina, and generosity. The spirit's impressed, and he takes the Buddha as his refuge.

In the Dhamma textbooks in Thailand, they call these four qualities laypersons' Dhamma. But there's nothing in the list to indicate it's just for laypeople. It's for monks as well. As you develop these qualities in your daily life, they're going to be good for your meditation.

The first one is truth—and that doesn't mean just telling the truth, it means *being* true. You make up your mind you're going to do something, you stick with it, you meet your duties. If there are things you have to give up, you really give them up.

This is a quality that the Buddha exemplified. You may know the story that he'd been dropping hints for Ven. Ananda to invite him to stay on, and Ananda kept missing all the hints. So finally the Buddha decided to abandon what he called the fabrications of life, which meant that in three months' time he was going to die. A big earthquake resulted. Ananda was startled by the earthquake and came to ask the Buddha what that was all about. The Buddha told him what he had done. So Ananda said, "Please reconsider!" And the Buddha said, "No. Don't harass me. Once I've given up something, I've given it up."

So try to develop that quality in your life, that when you realize that something is unskillful, something is harmful, and no matter how much you may like it, you realize you've *got* to give it up. Find some way to convince yourself that, yes, you're going to give it up and then stick with that.

Similarly with things that are difficult to do but you know are going to be good for you: You learn how to talk yourself into doing them. Notice, there's an element of discernment and ingenuity here: the ability to psych yourself up, to motivate yourself so that you *want* to do the things that are difficult and you really stick with them.

So this quality of truthfulness requires some discernment, some wisdom, that once you've made up your mind that something is worth doing, you keep at it. And you can keep talking yourself into keeping at it. You don't give in to the voices that say, "I've had enough," or, "This is too much for me." So truth is one of the qualities you can develop as you go through daily life.

The second one is self-control. This primarily means controlling yourself when people do really irritating or provoking things: You don't respond in kind. You keep your words under control; you keep your actions under control. Maybe your mind is racing with all sorts of great sarcastic replies to something someone says, but you realize, "Nope, it's not going to be worth it." You learn how to keep a lid on things.

Now, this requires that you learn how to not turn the mind into a pressure cooker. Again, you remind yourself that you're better off by not saying those things. Whatever physical pressure there may be in the body, realize that it's simply a matter of the anger having hijacked your breath, so you take the breath back. Breathe calmly. Breathe in a way that releases a lot of the tension you're feeling.

And for all the voices that say, "Oh, they're going to treat me like a doormat, they're going to treat me as if I'm a nothing," remember that those are voices that don't know the Dhamma. If there are people who look down on you for not reacting, okay, they don't know the Dhamma, either. Why do you have to show them what you're made of? Actually, with self-control you show them that you're made of better stuff than they are. So self-control is another quality that you need to develop as you go through life, another good Dhamma for daily life.

The third quality is stamina. And it's interesting that one of the main discussions of stamina in the Canon has to do with goodwill. When people come to irritate you, the Buddha says to remind yourself that your goodwill is bigger than they are. He says to think of your goodwill as being as large as the River Ganges, as cool as the River Ganges, as immense as the Earth itself, as immense as space. And the people who are irritating you are like someone who's trying to burn up the Ganges with a torch; or trying to make the Earth be without earth by taking a shovel and pissing on the earth and spitting on the earth, digging a little here and digging a little there. In other words, learn to see their provocation as ridiculous, minor, small.

You have more important things to do, one of which is to maintain your goodwill. Remember, as the Buddha said, that in the same way a mother would look after her only child

even to the point of sacrificing her life, you should look after your goodwill even to the point of sacrificing your life. And it's easier to do that when you can conceive it as something really large—in other words, something that you bring out in all circumstances and that's impervious to all provocations.

Because the trick to stamina and endurance is not to focus on the things that are irritating but to focus on the areas where your strengths are, where things are actually going well. And you want to make goodwill one of your strengths. We often hear of the practice of goodwill as being something soft and gentle. But you read about the forest ajaans, and they regarded goodwill as a weapon, as a protection, a shield.

There's that great story in Ajaan Lee's autobiography where he's off on tudong with a group of laypeople. They're staying in a forest at the edge of the ocean. He sees huge clouds of mosquitoes coming in off the ocean. So he orders everybody to put up their mosquito nets and he says, "I'm going to fight these mosquitoes off with goodwill, and no holds barred." And the mosquitoes go away.

So think of goodwill as a strength, as something really immense, and that helps your stamina stay strong.

Then finally there's generosity, the realization that you *do* have things to share. If all you can think about is how you lack this and lack that, you become poor. Try to think about what you *do* have that you *can* share with other people, even in the midst of your responsibilities. It gives you a sense of wealth, a sense of inner worth, and that's all to strengthen your practice.

Because you can take these four qualities and apply them to the meditation. You're true in focusing on your object. You make up your mind you're going to stay with the breath and abandon all other thoughts: Well, stick with that. Be true to that. And it's easier to be true in your meditation when you've learned to be true in your daily life.

Self-control: Whatever irritations there may be in the surroundings around you, okay, you don't react to them. Just let them go past.

Stamina: You hold up against all the pains that may come in as you're sitting here.

Generosity: All the nice little thoughts you could be thinking right now, you just give them up.

When you've developed these qualities in daily life, they really help your meditation, so that when the times come when you *can* get away from your responsibilities, you've got the strengths you need in order to make the most of your solitude.

So remember, it *is* possible to practice the Dhamma in daily life and it doesn't mean simply being mindful. It means developing good qualities in all your interactions. You make yourself stronger, more resilient, more large-hearted, less reactive. And these qualities will serve you well, both inside and out.