

Abandoning Effluents (3)

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We've been going over the list of the Buddha's approaches for dealing with *asavas*, or effluents. There are seven in all. Remember, too, that the *asavas* come in a set of three: the effluent of sensuality, the effluent of becoming, and the effluent of ignorance. The first of the approaches, *seeing*—i.e., seeing in terms of appropriate attention—is applied to abandoning the effluents of becoming and ignorance, because you're putting aside questions that deal with your identity, which is the kernel of becoming, focusing instead on seeing things in terms of the four noble truths. That puts an end to ignorance.

The next four approaches deal with the *asava* of sensuality. There's *restraining* the senses, *reflecting* on the requisites as you use them, *tolerating* pain—painful words, painful feelings—and *avoiding* dangers.

That leaves two more approaches, and these deal with all of the *asavas*. The first is *destroying*. If a thought of sensuality comes up in the mind, a thought of ill will, a thought of harmfulness, or any unskillful quality, you put an end to it. You don't just sit there and watch it. You may have to watch it for a while to understand it, but you're watching it as a spy would watch an enemy. You watch it until you can see the enemy's weak points. Then you attack.

Another approach is *developing*. In this case, it means developing the seven factors for awakening. You start with mindfulness, and mindfulness leads to analysis of qualities. In other words, you're mindful to stick with your frame of reference. Then whatever comes up in the context of that frame of reference—whether it's the body or your feelings or the mind or mental qualities—you try to figure out which mental events are skillful and which are not skillful.

That leads to the next factor for awakening, which is persistence. Once you see that something is unskillful, you try to abandon it. If it's skillful, you try to maintain it, develop it. That will ideally lead to a sense of rapture as the mind gets more and more at peace, as unskillful qualities fall away. From the rapture then comes calm. From calm comes concentration, and from concentration, you get equanimity.

These two sets—the destroying and the developing—go together. There is that pattern throughout the path: As you're developing good qualities in the mind, you're basically creating a state of becoming, but then other becomings will come up in the mind, and you can't let them destroy the good state you're trying to develop. For example, when you're practicing mindfulness and concentration,

you've got to stay with your frame of reference. Say it's the breath, as we're focusing on right now. Then you have to put aside greed and distress with reference to the world. Any thoughts that come up with reference to the world that would pull you out of this frame of reference, you've got to put them aside. You discipline them, get them under control. You can't let them come in and destroy what your concentration is trying to build here—because, after all, the path *is* something you build. It's a sankhara, a fabrication, and as with all fabrications, it has a tendency to start dissolving away. So you've got to work at it. In fact, this pattern of destroying and developing can cover everything that we do in the path.

In the sutta on the customs of the noble ones, the Buddha talks about delighting in developing and delighting in abandoning. The commentators say that this one phrase covers everything in the Dhamma. In fact, these two activities go so well together that you could actually say that the destroying is actually part of the developing—it's there in the persistence—and the two of them together cover all of the factors of the noble eightfold path. The destroying includes right resolve and all of the factors for virtue: right speech, right action, and right livelihood, because these things depend on maintaining skillful intentions and not acting on unskillful ones. And it's also part of right effort, the destroying part.

As for the seven factors for awakening you're developing, you've got right view in analysis of qualities. And the whole set of seven shows how the practice of mindfulness under the influence of right view then leads to right concentration.

So you've got everything together in these two approaches. Then why does the Buddha tease things out into seven different approaches? Partly to remind you of the various ways these approaches of developing and destroying can apply, even in some simple areas like how you eat, how you look at your wardrobe, the decisions you make about your wardrobe, the decisions you make about the place you're going to live, how much energy you want to put into these things, how developing and destroying apply even to how you look at things, how you look away from things, how you listen to things, how you don't listen to things, or the way in which you listen to something that's coming your way that you can't avoid. By teasing things out in terms of these other approaches, the Buddha is showing you that you've got to see how everything you do is related to either increasing the effluents that will lead you to stay stuck in suffering and samsara, or decreasing them, opening the path to getting away. Then, when the path develops, that faculty of seeing reminds you that you've got to reflect on it, too.

This leads to another simple formula that the Buddha used when talking about the path. He said the Dhamma comes from commitment and reflection. In

committing yourself to the various approaches for dealing with the asavas, you're putting forth energy. You're making an effort. Then you've got to reflect, because as you're making an effort, you're taking responsibility for your actions. This is really important. Sometimes you hear that to get on the path you have to tell yourself you're not doing the path, because if you think that you are doing the path, it's wrong view, because you're getting engaged in a sense of self. But the Buddha never encourages you to drop your sense of self right off the bat.

When he talks in terms of mindfulness, when something unskillful inside you comes up, you say, "This hindrance say of sensual desire is present in me." When he talks to Rahula about reflecting on his actions, "This action I want to do... this action I am doing... this action I have done, will it cause harm?" You use that sense of I and me to remind yourself that you are responsible. You're taking responsibility.

This is not a path where things just happen on their own. You think of the Buddha's images for the practice. The main ones have to do with victory in battle or the mastering of a skill. To be a victor in battle, you have to develop your strengths and you've got to eliminate the enemy. You don't just sit there and let things happen on a battlefield. Similarly with mastering a skill: You have to do the work of developing all the relevant skills. You have to get rid of any mind states that would wander away, get lazy, think about other things when you should be focusing your mind on your work, because that chair you're making, or that dish of food you're making—it's not going to make itself. You've got to make it.

To do that, you've got to work on developing certain qualities inside and abandoning other ones. You also have to reflect on what you're doing. As a good soldier, you reflect on what has worked in battles in the past. As a good craftsman, you reflect on what's worked in the chairs you've made in the past, or the dishes of food you've made in the past. You learn by reflecting on your actions and their results. In the same way, the approach of seeing—seeing things in terms of appropriate attention—monitors what you're doing in all these other approaches.

Finally, when they've done their work—when the factors for awakening have been fully developed, any unskillful qualities in the mind have been abandoned and destroyed—that's when you remind yourself: Okay, there has to be something beyond becoming. You're still looking in terms of the four noble truths, remembering that the fourth truth has to be developed, and then it too has to be put aside.

So in that case, the approach of seeing in terms of appropriate attention reflects back on what you've been developing and abandoning.

This is why it's good to have this all teased out into seven different approaches to see how every little thing you do as you go through the day is related to asavas one way or another. It's not a concept we think about that much: what's flowing out of your mind right now. We're more attuned to what's coming in. But the whole purpose of having these approaches is to see how much you are flowing out and shaping things, and how you can do a better job.

This is why the Buddha says it's important to delight in abandoning and to delight in developing. At the same time, you have to find an environment that encourages you to do that, as you live in the outside world, which tries to lure you into its activities by making you delight in wealth and status, praise, sensual pleasures, the ways of the world. If the world offered nothing but those good things, it wouldn't be a bad place. But it offers a lot of their opposites as well.

There's loss of wealth, loss of status, criticism, pain. The good things make you forget yourself as you get pulled into their opposites. What the Buddha wants you to do is to turn around and look at what you are doing, what's flowing out of your mind. Solve that problem, and you can find something that has no drawbacks at all.

So appreciate the fact that you're in an environment where you've got some seclusion, and you can focus on the issues of what you need to develop in the mind, what you need to abandon in the mind—and that these things take top priority. If you don't have an environment like this, well, look for one, because it makes things a lot easier. In the meantime, really do the best you can to encourage yourself to delight in developing and to delight in destroying, because as the Buddha says elsewhere, that kind of delight leads to the ending of the effluents. That's the goal, because the ending of effluents is right there on the verge of unbinding: total freedom no drawbacks at all.