

The Purpose of Acceptance

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There's a passage in the Canon where the Buddha tells Rahula to make his mind like earth. People throw disgusting things on the earth and the earth doesn't recoil. He says that, in the same way, you should make your mind non-reactive to things pleasant or unpleasant.

But it's interesting: He doesn't stop there: We not here just for non-reactivity. We try to be as non-reactive as possible so we can see clearly what's actually going on. Because sometimes some really unpleasant things are happening, and the mind is weighing itself down with the pain. You're not going to see the distinction between the outside pain and the pain that you're adding unless you're willing to sit with this kind of thing for a while to notice what's actually happening. If anything negative comes up and you react immediately, you won't understand anything at all.

So our non-reactivity here is for the purpose of understanding how the mind is fabricating. Then we try to fabricate in a more skillful way. We don't just stop with the non-reactivity. We figure out, "What's a more skillful way to breathe? What's a more skillful way to think about these things? What are more skillful perceptions to hold in mind? How can you create feelings of well-being even in the midst of negative incidents, negative happenings?"

So try to make your mind like earth—or as the Buddha said, "Make your mind like fire: Fire burns disgusting things but the fire doesn't recoil from them. Make your mind like water: Water washes disgusting things away and yet it doesn't get disgusted by those things. The wind blows disgusting things around but the wind itself isn't disgusted."

As you're as non-reactive as you can be, then you begin to notice what's actually going on: what fabrications lie below the surface and how you can direct them in a more skillful direction. So you don't just stop by being still or stop by being accepting. You admit what's happening so that you can figure it out and learn how not to suffer from it.

That's the point where the practice gets really special. If the practice were simply a matter of endurance or patience or acceptance, as they often say in Thailand even water buffalos are very accepting of things—but I haven't seen any water buffalos get enlightened anytime recently.

We're non-reactive for the purpose of understanding, to help our discernment, to make it clearer, to make it sharper, so that we can figure out

exactly what we're doing that's causing the suffering and how we can stop.