

The Path Leads to a Goal

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There was a cartoon in *The New Yorker* a while back: a guy sitting on the side of the street with a little tin can, waiting for alms, and a little sign that says, "Followed My Bliss."

There's a way in which the cartoon is right and also a way in which it's wrong.

It's right in that if you just follow your bliss without any guidance from outside it can take you all kinds of places and you end up on the side of the street.

But the Buddha found a special kind of bliss that wouldn't lead there. He was the sort of person who said, "Okay, if bliss is really bliss, it has to be harmless and nothing blameworthy about it." It has to be solid, because if it changes, then you end up on the side of the street like that.

So we are following our bliss in one way, but we're not doing it just in any old blissful way we like. We realize that there's a discipline that's needed here. So we submit ourselves to the discipline in the realization that it does lead to the heart's true desire, which is a happiness that doesn't change, a happiness that doesn't disappoint.

So we are on a path leading to a goal. That point gets obscured many, many times when they say, "The path is the goal." They're denying the fact that there is a bliss, that there is a happiness, that can be totally satisfying. A once and for all kind of thing: Once you've fully attained it, you don't have to do anything more.

As the Buddha said, for the arahants there's nothing more they need to do for the sake of their true happiness, and nothing needs to be added to what they've done.

So that's what we're looking for. But to get there requires that we take on certain practices, take on certain disciplines: Some things we may like to do, other things we may not like to do, but we have the wisdom and discernment to talk ourselves into abandoning some of the things that we like to do that would lead back to the tin can on the side of the street, and into doing the things we may not like to do but are going to lead us to a genuine happiness.

We're not just animals. We're beings who have a sense of past and future and a sense of responsibility. So we want to be responsible about our happiness and take the long view. This is what heedfulness is all about. It's from heedfulness that the path grows.

So even though there may be difficulties along the way, we're willing to put up with them and to learn from them. And to grow stronger because of them.

We want to make sure that we never get discouraged on this path, because it is a path that ultimately does lead to genuine bliss: in fact, the only really healthy bliss that the Buddha recognized at all. And he'd see a lot of different kinds of blisses before finding the genuine thing.