

## *Renunciation*

*March 16, 2005*

There go the helicopters again. That's what happens when you hold on, hold on, hold on: You've got to fight. The resources of the world are limited. The desires of the human heart can be pretty unlimited. As the Buddha once said, even if it rained gold coins, it wouldn't be enough to satisfy our desire for sensual pleasures.

This is why renunciation is so important. When you can let go of those desires, you find that you're really free.

Someone called tonight with a question. Do arahants have free will? And it seemed like one of those non-starters. Arahants are free, period. As the verse says, like the path of birds through space, their path can't be traced. They're free because they don't have to feed. This doesn't mean that they've starved themselves. They've actually attained something that doesn't need feeding. That's the basis of their happiness. And it's a gift, not only to themselves, but also to the world around them. They don't have to feed on this, that, or the other thing. You don't have to worry that they're going to make their next meal out of you. And for each of us here, this can be our gift to the world too. Even if we don't get that far in the practice, learning how to let go of unnecessary pleasures makes us lighter and less of a burden on the world.

The way we do this is first by learning how to feed inside, by giving ourselves good mental states as a basis for our happiness. It's interesting that when the Buddha divides right resolve into two levels—the mundane level and the transcendent level—all the factors are connected. The mundane level is resolving on renunciation, on no ill will, and on harmlessness. All these three go together, as different facets of the same thing. When you renounce your fascination with sensual plans, you're less harmful. When you let go, it's easier not to feel ill will for people because you don't have to fight them over things. You don't have to be jealous of them when they take what you wanted, so you're not harming yourself.

Then, on the transcendent level, right resolve is, essentially, the thinking and evaluating that bring the mind to *jhāna*: good, strong states of concentration. That's your food inside. Some of the passages talk about feeding on rapture as food for the mind. There's another sutta that compares the different factors of the path to different parts of a fortress, and the *jhānas*, good strong levels of concentration: Those are the stores of food. When you're well fed inside like this, there's no need to go out feeding on other people or taking anything away from them.

What this means is that your food source, the source for your happiness, is a lot more certain: You're the one who creates it, you're the one who can maintain it, you're the one responsible for it. It's in trustworthy hands. At the same time, you can be less of a burden on other people because you have this internal food source.

And giving up things outside is not starving yourself. Actually, you find that you're more and more full all the time, with qualities of mindfulness and concentration: These are things that you can carry around with you wherever you go. They're not like meditation cushions: You don't have to stick them under the platform here when you leave, you don't have to carry them to your next sit. So, in this way, you're finding a more solid type of happiness. And the rest of the beings in the world have one less person to fight them for what they want. It gives them a sense of security as well.

All that time I was living with Ajaan Fuang, I had a very strong sense that he was a person without any greed. He could live very simply just sitting alone in his room or sitting up on the mountain. He was perfectly content. And as a result, I really felt I could trust him. I never had the feeling he was going to make a meal out of me. After he passed away, they appointed someone else as acting abbot. And I found it intolerable. This particular person had a lot of greed, and having been used to living with someone who didn't have any greed, it was very difficult to make the adjustment back. So I got a very strong sense of what a gift it is to the world to not be a greedy person, not having to feed on other people emotionally, to be content with little.

That comes from this practice we're doing right here, right now. It's a real gift not only to ourselves, but to the world.

So keep that in mind as you're practicing, when you find yourself running up against something you've got to give up, either because of the Vinaya or because of the way we live here. Remember that it's a trade, not a deprivation. If everything were really easy here, you'd start getting lazy, and your work on your inner resources would start falling slack. But having to give up this, that, and the other thing directs you inside. It keeps reminding you that the real food is inside. The sense of ease, the sense of pleasure, the sense of rapture, refreshment, is a much more satisfying, gratifying food for the mind. Once you've developed it, you can feed on it to your heart's content.

If you haven't gotten there yet, just keep reminding yourself this is where it's all leading, this practice of renunciation. Because, after all, it is a better form of happiness. Not better in the sense of having somebody standing over you with a ruler saying you'd better do this, but better because once you gain this form of

happiness and you look at the other pleasures you have in the world, you really see that this is a lot more gratifying, something you can carry around with you all the time—if you work on it, if you perfect it.

It does require effort, but then again there are points in the practice where things click and actually hit a stage from which you can't fall back, because you've seen something deeper. And that really rearranges your relationship to everything else. It puts you in a much better position. Your food sources are no longer so vulnerable. You never find yourself thrown into a position where you really have to fight other people for what you want and they want. Because what you've got is something they can't touch.

So this is why right resolve grows out of right view. When you see that the causes of suffering are inside, and that the potential for putting an end to suffering is inside as well, you want to focus all your efforts here and not let them get scattered out.

So as you're working on right concentration, remember that this is how we fulfill the factors of right resolve. It's the greater happiness that comes from letting go of a lesser happiness. It's a simple proposition, but it takes work. Because our mind is so used to having clamoring desires—when to eat this, take that—it takes training to focus on the desire that points you the right direction, the desire to renounce sensual pleasures, the desire to renounce ill will, to let go of harmfulness. Even when you don't attain states of jhana, having these resolves in mind and practicing the precepts, a sense of well-being comes. But then it goes even deeper as you get into good states of concentration. That gives you the food to keep you on the path: your provisions for the journey.