

Other People

July 29, 2015

There's a passage in the Dhammapada when the Buddha says that you don't go to heaven or to hell because of other people's actions. Yet all too often we find ourselves in our own mental heaven or hell because of what someone else did. Actually, though, we're the ones who create that heaven and hell. It's through our own actions that we take what they did, what they said, or even what we think they thought, and turn it into our own private heaven or our own private hell.

We have to watch out for that, because if our moods depend on other people's actions, we're in really bad shape. There's nothing constant about what they do. The people who are good to us today may not be good to us tomorrow. The people whose opinion we value today may do something really harmful tomorrow. Or people that we look down on today tomorrow may do something really good.

You need your own independent spot inside. It's made by a combination of developing concentration and also having some discernment. The concentration gives you a good place to stay, your own separate sense of energy, your own separate source of energy—like in the days when the Burmese attacked Ayutthaya. Ayutthaya was able to withstand the siege for a long time because they had their own sources of water and food inside the walls of the city.

Concentration serves as your food and water. You learn how to breathe in a way that gives you some energy, a sense of well-being, even when you're frazzled at the end of the day. You learn how to step back from the mood of your being frazzled and breathe in a way that feels really good, really soothing inside, energizing inside. Find when you breathe in: Where does it feel soothing? Where does it feel good when you breathe in, breathe out? If you can't really decide whether it feels good or not, hold your breath for a while. Then when you finally do breathe, it's going to feel good. Well, notice the spot where it feels best, and make that the focal point of your awareness.

Be sensitive to the fact that the body's going to have its own needs and that they're going to change, so you have to be alert to what it needs and make adjustments. As you get more and more interested in this, you get a sense of well-being not only in the body but also in the mind—because it's not running around all over the place. It can rest.

Now, be careful when you rest not to drift off. You have to be very, very mindful of what you're doing. This is why, when the breath gets comfortable, you try to be aware of your whole body. Think of everything from the top of the head

down to the toes and everything in-between. Try to be aware of that all at once. If you're really fully aware of the body, it's hard to be aware of anything else at the same time, because that awareness is all-around. It's not focused just on one spot. If you're focused on one spot, sometimes it's easy to pick up something else as well. It's as if you have one thing in one hand but your other hand is free to pick up anything else. But if you're with the whole body, no hands are free, not even your feet are free, not even your ears are free. You can't pick up anything else.

When you have this sense of your own independent source of energy, then it's a lot easier to be immune to the ups and downs of other people's actions, other people's moods.

But the concentration on its own is not going to do it. You have to also develop some discernment. You have to see: What is it that makes you want to go out and feed on other people's actions? What is the hunger that you're trying to assuage? We can have lots of different hungers. Sometimes there's the hunger to look down on other people. We actually take delight in other people's flaws as we've seen them. Of course, that way we miss the big flaw in our own selves.

As Ajaan Mun used to say, oftentimes we can see the sawdust on other people's skin but we can't see the big log that's sticking in our own eye. So you have to be careful about that.

Other times, things are more straightforward: You like to hear people say nice things about you, but they're not. Or you want to see people doing something that strikes you as intelligent and they don't do it. They do something really stupid, and it means more work for you. Okay, what kind of mood are you going to feed on there?

Ajaan Fuang had some good advice. He said when you see something needs to be done and other people aren't doing it properly, here's your opportunity to make merit. There was one time when he was leading a group of people up to meditate on the chedi on the hillside there in Wat Dhammasathit. They got up there, though, they found garbage all over the area around the chedi. So Ajaan Fuang had them clean it up first. One of the people complained, "How could anybody leave garbage in a place like this?" And Ajaan Fuang said, "Don't complain about them. Just pick it up. This is your opportunity to make some merit."

When you learn how to think in the proper way, that can also liberate you from feeding on other people's moods, other people's actions. And when other people do good, you can see it as a sign that there are people in this world who do good. You get some energy from that. Otherwise, if all you can see are other people's drawbacks, your own goodness gets stale and shriveled. You have to see

their good points as well. When you can notice them, that's energy for you. Don't be jealous of them. They've got some good—sometimes they've got some good better than you have. Well, here's your chance to see a good example. When other people act in ways that are really bad, you can remind yourself, "Okay, this is what bad actions look like from outside. Maybe I've got some actions just like that."

So regardless of what other people do, you've got to learn how to think in ways that help liberate your mind from being a slave to their actions or making your moods depend on their actions. You have to learn how to develop the right mood to practice, to energize yourself to practice, so you need for your motivation to come from within in a healthy way.

To keep yourself from falling to hell or going to heaven over other people's actions, you've got to learn how to separate yourself out. Remember, it's actually *your* actions that are creating the heaven and the hell. Don't weigh yourself down with hells and don't get complacent about the heavens. There's got to be a spot in the mind where you can step back from all of these moods and just watch. When the body is energized, when the body is tired, you've got to have the ability to drop your moods and just watch them.

That's when you find something that's even more liberating than a good mood: the ability not to be a slave to the ups and downs of your moods. That's a state of mind that's really worth cultivating. It requires concentration, it requires discernment, but it's one of the really basic ways in which we liberate ourselves from being a slave to the world.