

A Haven for Inner Wealth

May 6, 2016

When we take refuge in the Buddha, and the Dhamma, and the Sangha, what are we trying to protect? We're trying to protect our well-being. We take refuge in them because they give good examples of how to give rise to well-being and how to protect it. So where does that well-being come from? As the Buddha said, there are three kinds of food for consciousness. There's consciousness itself, and then there's contact—contact at the senses, contact in the mind itself. And then there are our intentions. Of those three, the last is the most important, because our intentions are what drive what we do and say and think. These actions, of course, is going to give rise either to pleasure or pain, well-being or ill. So that's where the real food is.

Now, we do get some satisfaction out of the sense of well-being at contact or at consciousness of pleasure, as when we're sitting here and meditating, with this contact at the breath. When the breath feels comfortable, the mind has a sense of feeling well fed. Otherwise, it's going to go off and look for who knows what as its food. But if we have a sense of well-being here, that's one level of feeding the mind.

But the intention to stay with the object of concentration: That's the real food here—the realization that you know you're doing something good, something that's good not only right now, but also over the long term. That's nourishing for the mind. It creates good habits. So whatever qualities help us focus on creating more of this good food for the mind, those are our treasures, and those are the things we want to protect as well.

The Buddha has a list of seven treasures, and they all focus on what's necessary to protect the intentions of the mind. The list starts off with conviction, i.e., conviction that the Buddha really was awakened, the implication there being that true happiness is something that human beings can find. That's the message of his awakening, the message that applies to us directly—that, and the message that the levels of possible happiness are many and varied, but some that lie beyond anything that you can imagine. Yet they're all possible through our actions. So you have conviction that your actions really matter, and that they can make a difference like this. That conviction keeps you more focused on making sure that you're feeding off the right kind of intentions right now.

And there are virtue, shame, and compunction. These three qualities go together. Virtue is the promise you make to yourself that you're not going to harm

anybody, and then you stick with that promise. This requires mindfulness; it requires alertness. That's how it develops qualities that are good for concentration practice, because you have to keep your precepts in mind, your original intention in mind. You have to be alert to what you're doing to make sure that it does stay in line with your original intention.

Ajaan Fuang once had a student who saw all her friends taking the eight precepts, so she decided to take them too. She came to the monastery, and the first afternoon she walked past a guava tree. The guavas looked just right—ripe and ready to eat—so she popped one right in her mouth. Ajaan Fuang happened to see her and said, “Hey, what happened to your precept there? What's that in your mouth?” She suddenly realized that she had totally forgotten what the eight precepts meant. As he comforted her he said, “Well, make sure you hold onto the one precept, which is the precept of the mind.” That's the one that covers all the rest. Keeping in mind the fact that you've made a promise to yourself: That's what enables you to stick with all the precepts.

Now, shame and compunction help here, too. Shame is when you think of doing something that would be against the precepts, or anything that would be unskillful at all, and you have a sense that it's beneath you. You'd be ashamed to do that. This is a healthy sense of shame that goes with self-esteem. The same with compunction: It's the realization that if something you do is unskillful, then it's going to lead to suffering down the line for yourself or for other people. And just that sense of conscience, the fear of those consequences, holds you back. These qualities protect your good mental food.

Then there's learning, i.e., learning from the Dhamma, which gives you ideas about what's skillful, what's not skillful, and how to develop what's skillful, and abandon what's not.

And there's generosity: realizing that you have more than enough. In other words, through your good intentions you've been creating lots of good things, and you can share them with other people. That lightens the mind, it expands the mind. There's a sense of well-being that comes with that. That well-being, again, becomes food for the mind. It encourages you to stick with good intentions all the more.

Finally, there's discernment, when you see what is actually skillful and what is not, and you pursue that into more and more subtle levels.

These are the qualities we want to protect because they protect our good actions. That's why they're our treasures. When we're meditating, we want to keep this in mind, that these are qualities we need to protect to make sure that our well-being really is solid.

Now, to develop these treasures, this noble wealth, the same principles apply as in the Buddha's instructions on how to become wealthy on the material level.

You start out by having initiative. You don't just wait for these things to come your way, or wait for other people to do them. You realize, "I've got to develop them myself."

Then you protect them, i.e., you maintain what you've got. You don't just look at the mind and watch things coming and going, seeing something good coming, and saying, "Well, I don't want to be attached to it," and then let it go. If something good comes, you want to maintain it. In fact, that's one of the duties of mindfulness: to give rise to good states in the mind and then to maintain them when they're there. We read so much about insight into things arising and passing away, that we forget that for that insight to have any value at all, it has to be based on a mind that's really solid.

So you work to get the mind to settle down. It's pleasant work. It can be frustrating at times, but at least you're not getting dirty, you're not sweating under the hot sun, and you're not doing anything that you would be ashamed to do. You're developing your insight; you're developing your discernment as you get the mind to settle down. You're going to have to figure out what's keeping the mind from settling down, and what you can do to get around that so that the mind does have a sense of well-being with the breath. That's something you want to maintain. Once you've got it, hold on to it. And then you take some pleasure in it.

This is an important part of the meditation. The Buddha talks about how, when you're getting the mind to settle down, there's a sense of well-being that comes when you've let go of unskillful qualities, and there's a sense of refreshment in the mind because it's not being driven around. Once that sense of well-being comes, there's a sense of spaciousness. You let that sense of well-being spread throughout the whole body.

The Buddha's image is of a bath man. Back in those days they didn't have bars of soap like we have now. They had a kind of soap powder which a bathman would mix with water, and make a kind of a dough, and then you'd rub that over your skin, and wash it off. If you were the bathman, when you made the dough, you'd take the powder and you mix it with water, and you'd mix it just right. It was like kneading water into bread flour. You want to make sure that the whole ball of dough is moistened.

In the same way, when there's a sense of well-being, you work it through the different parts of the body. You start with one spot, but you don't stay there, because you're trying to develop a concentration that's solid. And the most solid kind of concentration is based on a large framework that doesn't get knocked over

by things. If your concentration is just one tiny point, then when you change the point or the point gets knocked over, the concentration is gone. But if you've got a sense of the whole body as your framework, then as the breath calms down, you're not lost. When the breath stops, you're not lost. You're right here with the body. And, as the Buddha says, you indulge in that, you take pleasure in that.

This corresponds with the Buddha's third principle for gaining wealth, which is that you learn how to enjoy it in moderation. In other words, you're not so stingy that you just hide all your money under a mattress and eat nothing but dried bread and water. You take some of your wealth and you learn to enjoy it, because that enjoyment is a kind of food for the mind, the food that comes from contact. Even though it's not as nourishing as the food that comes from intention, still it's good for the mind. It keeps you going on the path. Without it, things start getting dry, and your attitude toward pleasure and pain gets all skewed. So you don't want to be too frugal, and, at the same time, of course, you don't want to be too extravagant. You live in a way that's just right.

And here, "just right" means getting your pleasure from the concentration but not getting so distracted from the breath that you just wallow around in the pleasure. Otherwise, you're going to lose the source of the pleasure to begin with. The Buddha said the sense of pleasure comes from staying attentive to the breath, being alert to the breath. So keep the cause going, and the results will come. You have just the right attitude toward the pleasure.

Then the fourth quality for developing wealth, which applies to both outside and inside, is having good friends. And these friends can be outside and inside, too. Your good outer friends advise you on how to be more generous, how to be more virtuous, how to have more conviction, how to develop more discernment—in other words, developing more of your true, inner treasures. Your good inner friends, of course, are the members of the mind, all those voices you've got, the ones that you can identify as helpful, the ones that really do have your long-term well-being in mind. You learn to hang out with them, and not listen to the other voices that would tear things down.

So the quality we're trying to protect as we take refuge in the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha is our own well-being, which comes from feeding the mind well on its real treasures, which are its skillful intentions. And all these other qualities help. They become treasures, too, that you want to protect. You want to give rise to them and then protect them, use them wisely, and learn how to look at your life this way. This is what's important to protect. When you see that this is what needs to be protected, then your concern with outside things—fear that your things might be stolen, or fear that you may die—gets less and

less. You realize that those things are not nearly as important as the treasures you've got inside. Because these treasures go beyond death. Having them makes you a lot less prey to fears, or to people who want to prey on your fears. They give you a sense of independence. You're independently wealthy because everything you need is right inside: the sources of your wealth are inside, the wealth itself is inside, and the well-being that comes from maintaining your wealth, using it wisely, that's inside, too.

The good thing, of course, is that once you've got this inner wealth, you can share a lot with others, and you've got good things to share. So when the question comes up, where do you want to invest your time—and the Buddha actually uses images of investment and wealth in his teachings—where do you want to invest your time and energy? the answer is: right here, developing these good qualities in the mind, the food for the mind, i.e., your skillful intentions. That's where time and energy invested pays off.

This is the message we have to keep in mind, and we have to keep it in mind very firmly, because there are so many other messages out there. People want our money. People want our support for who knows what? They don't have our well-being in mind. The sign of the Buddha's compassion is that he was thinking about our well-being: how we can give rise to our well-being and maintain it. That's what he taught. That's a message that's worth listening to. The other messages, just let them go. Because your well-being is something you have to take care of. Don't let yourself get waylaid by people who don't have your well-being in mind.