The Right to Repair Your Mind

July 7, 2017

We were reading tonight about the right-to-repair movement. It turns out that a lot of corporations are making it impossible to repair the things you bought from them, unless you send them back to the corporation. A lot of people are complaining about that. It's as if the corporation still maintains ownership over what you've bought from them.

And it made me think: The Buddha's approach to the mind is that you have the right to repair your mind. There are a lot of people out there who say, No, somebody else has to do this for you. But he's saying that you've got the wherewithal within yourself to solve the mind's problems, particularly the problem of suffering.

The four noble truths are his repair manual. They're things you can find within yourself. They're right here, right now—all four truths. And the reason we haven't seen them is that some of them are very subtle, and some of them go against the grain. But if you make up your mind that you really do want to solve the problem of suffering, everything you need is right here. You've got all the tools.

The first noble truth is the truth basically that all forms of suffering can be reduced to clinging. That's usually the last thing we look at when we're suffering from something; we focus on the pain, how much we don't like the pain, we want somebody to do something to take care of it, and we tend to blame the problem on something outside. That's why we hope for the solution to come from outside, but as the Buddha said, The problem comes from within and you can solve it from within. Just learn how to recognize that every time there's an instance of suffering in the mind—whether it's over birth, aging, illness, death, separation from those you love, being with people you don't like, not getting what you want—in every case, the suffering is in the clinging. You're finding passion and delight in something—which means that even in suffering, there's an allure. There's something in there that makes you go for it. The problem is that we don't see the connection between the allure and the actual suffering. Which is why we keep going again and again and again.

The second noble truth is the fact of clinging comes from craving: craving for becoming, craving for sensuality, craving for no becoming. Notice, this doesn't cover every form of desire. There are other desires that are actually part of the path to the end of suffering. But these three are the ones that actually lead to the clinging that's going to be the suffering.

And again, we very rarely look at craving as a problem. We tend to like our cravings, we like our desires. This is one of the reasons why these truths are said to be noble, because they go against the grain. The other reason they're noble is that they're part of a noble search. As the Buddha said, there are two kinds of searches in life: the search for things that can age and grow ill and die, and then the search for things that don't age, don't grow ill, don't die. The first search is the ignoble search, and the second one is the noble search. Noble truths are truths that help with that noble search.

The third noble truth, the cessation of suffering, is basically the end of all passion for craving. Even your nostalgia for craving of the past, you have to let go of that. And you do that with the fourth noble truth, which is the noble eightfold path.

Now each of these truths carries a duty. This is why they're part of the repair kit. These truths are the manual that maps out the issue: This is what the problem is like, and these are the four things you've got to do. The duty with regard to suffering is to comprehend it, which means seeing how to develop some dispassion for whatever it is that attracts you to cling to things that will actually make you suffer.

The duty with regard to the cause of suffering is to abandon it. If you see it arising, let it go.

The duty with regard to the third noble truth is to realize it, to verify for yourself that this actually does happen—you can let go of craving.

And the duty with regard to the fourth noble truth is to develop it, everything from right view all the way through right concentration. You don't just watch these things arise and pass away. If there's anything you can do to give rise to them, you do. Anything that's getting in the way of their developing, you've got to abandon it.

So there's work to be done. Notice, the Buddha sets these things out in very broad patterns. One of the skills of meditation is learning how to apply that pattern to the particulars of your experience. This requires that you be observant, because to see the clinging in your suffering requires that you be very perceptive—and also to see where there's craving that you may not have noticed before.

And as for the potentials for all the good things in the path, those require subtle discernment as well. Sometimes concentration starts out very, very small, and it doesn't seem like much, and so you snuff it out. You want something better to come along. It's as if every time a little seed begins to sprout, even though it *is* a seed for a large tree, you say, "This is not a large tree, this is just a little sprout,"

and you pull it out. Well, there's no way you're going to get the large tree unless you allow the sprout to grow—encourage it to grow.

All of this requires that you be very observant. This is one of the reasons why in the forest tradition the teachers don't teach everything. Ajaan Fuang told me when I went back to ordain, he said, "Don't expect that everything is going to be handed to you on a platter." As a meditator, you have to learn to think like a thief: If a thief is planning to rob a house, he doesn't go up and ask the owners, "Where do you keep your valuables when you're going to be away, so I can have a nice convenient time getting in your house and stealing your stuff?" He has to observe on his own: When do the owners leave? When do they stay? What part of the house do they seem to be especially protective of? And it's through being observant that you get what you want.

Of course, that's an unskillful example, but it is an example of how you have to think as a meditator. You can't expect the teacher to explain everything. After all, when things come up in your meditation, the teacher is not going to be right there. And some problems you don't want to wait until the 5:00 pm question and answer session—you want to solve the problem right then. So you've got to learn to use your powers of observation.

With Ajaan Fuang, my duty eventually came to be the person who cleaned his hut, although he never told me where things had to be put. I had to observe on my own. If I put things in the wrong place, sometimes he'd throw them. Not *at* me, but he'd throw them someplace else, to indicate that that was not where they should be. He never would tell me where the right places were, but he'd just let me know, "Okay, you've got to be more observant." Sometimes he would give me tasks without really explaining the tasks very well. I'd have to figure them out on my own. I had to figure out one time how to make a stove for the dyeing shed out of termite dirt. He never explained to me what termite dirt was, or where it was. I had to find it myself.

So always bear this in mind, that if you really want to get the most out of the practice, there are a lot of things you're going to have to observe for yourself. And your willingness to observe is a sign of your desire to learn. If you say, "I'm only going to learn the things that I'm taught," it's like the kids in school who want to have an exam only on the things that they were taught in the classroom, which in a classroom may be okay, but in real life it's not the way things work. Sometimes you're going to be tested for things you didn't expect. You're going to be judged on areas where you didn't expect you'd be judged.

And this principle applies to the mind as well. There are certain forms of craving that are *not* going to make it easy for you to abandon them, certain forms

of clinging that are *not* going to be easy for you to comprehend. And nobody can stand there in your mind and say, "Look! Right here, right here, right here!"

This is one of the reasons that when you get the mind concentrated, the kind of concentration you want is all-around. You're fully aware of the body, fully aware *all-around.* A lot of the clingings and cravings of the mind hide behind the scenes. You're looking in one direction, and they're behind your eyeballs. So you have to learn how not to look just in one direction.

It's like the story they tell about the cannons that the British used to defend Singapore. They thought that if the Japanese attacked Singapore, they would come by sea, so they set the cannons in concrete pointed out to the sea. And then it turned out the Japanese came down the Malay Peninsula and the cannons were useless.

We're working on concentration. You're trying to bring your awareness to fill the body, and try to fill the body with a sense of pleasure. You've got body, feeling, mind—all right here. And you make that awareness *all-around.* When you're sitting here, try not to bring into the concentration the perception that you're facing forward. Your eyes may be facing forward, and we live in a world where we think that we're facing in one direction and we tend to carry that perception into the mind, that the mind is facing in one direction, too. But as soon as you close your eyes and focus on the body, try to make your awareness omni-directional.

You're looking in all directions. This is why they called the Buddha an all-around eye. He saw things in his mind, he saw things in his body, that people before him hadn't seen. Things that were right there, but things that people looked past. So if you're going to repair your mind, you take the general instructions that the Buddha gave, to give you an idea of what to look for. But as to whether or not you're really going to see it yourself—that depends on your own powers of observation.

What he asked for, he said, *Bring me a student who's observant and who's not a deceiver*. In other words he wanted someone who was honest and observant. *And I'll teach that person the Dhamma*. Those are the two qualities you want to bring into the practice. You can take the Buddha's repair manual and you can actually make good use of it—developing your own skill as a repair person for your mind.