

## *Victory in Battle*

*October 18, 2018*

Unexcelled victory in battle—that's one of the Buddha's names for the noble eightfold path, and it's good to keep that in mind. All too often, Dhamma practice is viewed as simple acceptance. You basically give up on any kind of battle and say, "Well, things are just going to pass away. They're inconstant, impermanent. There's nothing out there that's really worth getting anyhow"—which is very defeatist. The Buddha definitely said there are things that are worth getting. It's simply a matter of directing our minds in the right direction and understanding what real victory is.

There's a Pali term, *attha*, which means "goal," "purpose," and "benefit." It also means "meaning." The Buddha taught his teachings with a purpose, so people that will take them and put an end to suffering. The question is, are we going to make that our purpose too? Because we all have purposes. When the Buddha talks about how we fabricate the present moment, he said it's always for the purpose of something. We're hoping to get someplace. We don't just sit here. Even when he tells you to make your mind like earth, it's for a purpose, and the purpose isn't the earth. The purpose is to learn how to watch things carefully.

The problem is that we have lots of other purposes besides the Buddha's purpose, other ideas of what victory could be. We have to remember that the really worthwhile victory is victory inside. When they talk about the armies of Mara, it's basically the fifth column inside you. You're trying to find freedom, but there are parts of the mind that are trying to keep you tied down, so you have to regard them as traitors, as enemies. You can't identify with them.

So there is a battle, but winning the battle inside doesn't mean that you give up on winning some things outside. Look at the Buddha. After gaining awakening, he didn't just give up. He set out the teaching and walked all over northern India for 45 years, teaching individuals, setting up the Sangha. You read of his experiences having to deal with all the questions and all the problems that the monks and the nuns created. It wasn't the case that he simply said, "Well, I'm going to have a victory over myself and who cares about the rest of the world?" Having gained victory over himself, he then had the strength inside to look at what really needed to be done, what would be the wisest thing to do for the sake of the world. Because they came from his victory within, his actions were a lot more effective than they would have been otherwise.

So when you're dealing with issues outside, remember that the first victory comes inside, but that doesn't mean you give up on issues outside. You try to get the mind in a better position where it can look at things and then figure out what would be the best thing to do, what would be the best thing to say. When you don't let all of your narratives and attachments get in the way, it's a lot easier to see.

So look at this practice as a kind of victory, starting inside and then moving outside, but with the main emphasis being on the inside. There are a lot of things in the world you can't change. You can say the wisest thing possible, and sometimes people will not react in a very wise way. That's something you simply have to accept. There are a lot of people out there who will never be changed. There are a lot of things in the world that'll never be changed. We can't make our happiness depend on trying to change them. Start working with something that should be a lot more malleable, which is your own mind. Look into your own greed, your own aversion, your own delusion. Use the tools of the path. Create the sense of well-being inside that allows you to do work comfortably here in the present moment, and realize that the victory over every little defilement in the mind is really worth it.

I was talking with someone the other day who was saying that she wanted to figure out how to take care of all forms of greed all at once. I said, no, they're going to be individual cases. She gave me a despairing look, "That means I have to deal with *all* my defilements?" Yep, you have to deal with all your defilements. Because greed takes lots of different guises. It has lots of different strategies, lots of different ways of insinuating itself into your good graces. The same with anger; the same with delusion: You're going to have to learn how to see through all these things, which is why we keep practicing.

It's not the case that one single insight is going to take care of everything. It's a practice of gaining little victories here and little insights there, and then things begin to connect. As they connect, the practice goes deeper and deeper into the mind, where you find some of the common ground among all these defilements. That's when the practice gets a lot more focused. But in the beginning, it's like a mother hen trying to gather all her chicks under her wings. She gets this chick and that chick and ah!—the first little chick runs away. Gets that one, ah!—another one's gone away.

It can be frustrating at times, but as they say in Thai, you have to put yourself in a good mood and smile at the tigers. In other words, even though the battles you're doing sometimes seem very daunting, you don't let that get you down. After all, we have the example of the Buddha and the example of the noble

disciples that these battles can be won. Sometimes the Buddha and his disciples may seem superhuman, but you have to remember they're not. They all were human beings. They are human beings. It's simply that they've taken qualities that we have in a mild form and have learned how to strengthen them.

The important thing is that they learned to identify inside who are the traitors in the mind. You have to regard the defilements that way. They're friendly and they're nice: Those are the ones you have to watch out for. They promise you instant pleasure, but then as Ajaan Lee says, they get you doing unskillful things, and it's a case of someone who gets you to commit a crime and then, when the police come after you, they run away leaving you with the evidence. You're the one who gets punished. In other words, your unskillful actions are going to come back at you. They're not going to come back and punish your greed, aversion, and delusion.

So learn to look for the troublemakers inside—what Ajaan Lee calls the thieves, the con-men. Learn how to figure them out. When you can recognize them as something you really don't want to identify with, then you put yourself in a position where you can actually do battle with them.

Up to that point, it's like trying to do battle with your own arm or your own stomach. That's how it feels. You're doing battle with me, me, me, me, me, and the "me" in there keeps complaining, "Why are you doing battle with me? After all, aren't I you?"

But you have to realize, no, you have the choice to identify or not to identify with the unskillful qualities in your mind, and it's good to see them as something separate. That's how you get to know them, really understand them, really observe them, so that you can come out victorious over them. Because there is such a thing as long-term happiness. That's the beginning of wisdom. Not just seeing that long-term is better than short-term, but also seeing that long-term is possible. The idea that everything is simply inconstant and there's nothing really worth going for: That's not wisdom. Wisdom lies in seeing that long-term is possible, and it's worth the effort.

So it's a matter both of identifying the traitors inside and also identifying what is really worthwhile inside. When you have a victory, you want to have something to hold on to as the reward for your victory. And a state of well-being that's unaffected by change, that doesn't need to feed: That can be your reward. The irony, of course, is that once you get it, you don't have to hold on to it. In fact, if you try to hold on to it, you miss part of it, but it's there and it doesn't leave you once you're found it. That's what all the ajaans have verified. That's what the Buddhas verified.

So there is something that is worth gaining. There is something worth fighting for inside. Don't let the naysayers tell you otherwise, because they're armies of Mara as well.