

## *To Be Worthy of the Dhamma*

*January 8, 2021*

There's a teaching the Buddha gave on the four determinations, which I often use to talk about New Year's resolutions, but he gave it in the context of meditation. There's determination on discernment, determination for truth, determination for relinquishment, and determination for calm. The highest expression of all four of these determinations is nibbana, but the practice of meditation using these determinations is what gets you there.

There's a parallel here with the way the Buddha teaches breath meditation. It comes in sixteen steps—four tetrads, four steps per tetrad. In each tetrad, the pattern is this: You get sensitive to how you're fabricating that aspect of your experience. In some cases, you energize it, but then in all the cases you calm it down. To see these things in terms of fabrication is to be determined on discernment. Calming them down, of course, is to be determined on calm.

For example, with the breath: You're sensitive to how long the breath is, how short the breath is, how it feels throughout the entire body, and then as the Buddha says, you calm bodily fabrication. Now, when you look at some of his other instructions, you realize that you have to energize it first before you calm it down. As he said, if you're already somewhat sluggish and you calm the breath down even more, you put yourself to sleep. It's like adjusting a stereo. You get a brand new stereo. You want to hear how loud it is first, but you're not going to leave it loud all the time. You finally try to decide what feels just right. As you get more and more sensitive, you calm it down.

You can calm it all the way to the point where the breath stops. As the Buddha said, when he's talking about having your bodily fabrication calmed, it means being in the fourth jhana, where the in-and-out breathing stops. The breath energy is still there in the body. In fact, that's what allows the in-and-out breathing to stop. You connect everything inside. All the breath channels are open. If there's a lack of breath energy in any part of the body, energy from another part of the body will come in and fill it up.

In the tetrad on feelings, you start out with energizing feelings of rapture, and soothing feelings of pleasure. You do what you can to induce these feelings as you breathe in, as you breathe out. Then you begin to realize that these are mental fabrications. They're going to have an impact on the mind, so you try to calm that impact down. You look for feelings that are calming. You let go of the rapture,

leaving just the pleasure. Then from the pleasure, equanimity. But also you calm the perceptions, perceptions about the breath and that induce these different feelings.

You can calm things even further. The perception of space is more calming than any of the perceptions having to do with the four elements. When you get so that the breath does stop, then you begin to notice that the movement of the breath was what allowed you to have a sense of where the boundaries of the body are. Without that movement, the boundaries begin to dissolve into a mist. So you focus in on the space between the droplets of mist, and you begin to realize that the space permeates everything—permeates your body, permeates the area around your body, goes through the walls of the sala, out in all directions. There's space everywhere, with no sense of boundary. That's a very calming perception. Even more calming than space is "knowing" as a perception. So here again, you use discernment to be sensitive to fabrication and then you calm it down.

The same with the tetrad on the mind. First you get sensitive to the state of the mind, and then you figure out how to use perception and feeling to gladden the mind if it's been depressed or lacking in energy. Then you concentrate it, steady it. That calms it down. Then you release it stage by stage. You release it from gross perceptions to more refined ones, from gross feelings to more refined ones. When the mind is released in this way, it reaches an even deeper level of calm. Again the pattern is to be sensitive to fabrication, and then to calm it down: using discernment to begin with and then getting to calm.

In the last tetrad, you start out with being sensitive to the fact that fabrications are inconstant and are driven by your intentions. As you develop dispassion for those intentions, dispassion for the fabrications, they stop because you no longer create them—and then you relinquish everything, including the path that got you there. That's the ultimate calm.

So you're focused on the discernment that sees fabrication and on the ability to calm things down. Those are the first and the fourth determinations. The ability to arrive at calm comes through the other two: truth and relinquishment.

In being true, you really see what you're doing. This principle is so important that the Buddha put it at the very beginning of his teachings to Rahula when Rahula was only seven years old, before he taught him any other aspect of Dhamma: Be truthful. This starts with being truthful outside and moves to being truthful inside. What are you really doing? What's actually going on in your mind? What are your true intentions? It's when you admit them to yourself and can see them for what they really are, that's when you can let them go.

Remember how the Buddha told you to deal with things that are fabricated like this. You look for their origination, what's causing them. You look for their passing away. You look for their allure. This applies both to skillful and unskillful aspects of the mind. When you're trying to get the mind concentrated, the first thing to focus on, of course, is the unskillful side. What's getting in the way of allowing the mind to really settle down and really be honest with itself? What's the allure of that kind of thinking?

When you see the allure, and then the drawbacks, and that the drawbacks are not worth it, that's how you relinquish these things. In other words, you don't let go because somebody told you to. You can do that, of course. You can force things to calm down, but the mind is going to stay willingly with the calm only if it sees the harm that's caused by, first, unskillful activity and then any excess activity, even if it's relatively skillful.

So keep those two determinations in mind: truth and relinquishment. Really be true, and when you see something that you're doing that's causing any kind of stress, look into it truthfully enough until you can let it go. It's the truth that arms your discernment, and the relinquishment that allows for the calm. When you're determined in all four ways like this, the meditation is going to progress.

Remember, it is a determination. You have to set your heart on it. That's how you become worthy of the practice. I was reading a piece today by a board member of a Buddhist organization talking about how the Dhamma has to change. He said, "Yes, the Dhamma is timeless, but/and"—he had both "but" and "and"—"it's got to meet people's needs." Well, they want to meet people's *wants*, and they're treating it as a commodity, something you have to spiff up so people will be willing to buy without having to put in much effort. This is one of the reasons why the Buddha didn't put the Dhamma up for sale. He said you have to make yourself worthy of the Dhamma. It's only through your determination—through your discernment, through your truthfulness, through your relinquishment—that you arrive at that calm. You have to do the work.

As I pointed out yesterday, when the Buddha said that the Dhamma is attained through commitment and reflection, that's where the truth comes in. You truly are committed, and you truly watch yourself. That's how you lift yourself up and make yourself worthy of the Dhamma. As Ajaan Lee would put it, it's only when you're true that you get to know the truth, because you make yourself worthy of the truth. So think of the meditation that way. Through your determination you're making yourself worthy of something really worthwhile. Let that inspire you when the meditation gets difficult or just seems to be the same

thing over and over and over again. There *is* that aspect, but then again, that's how you see things clearly, going over things again and again and again.

It's like being a bus driver on a particular route. If you change routes everyday, you don't notice much. You see this, that, and the other thing, but there are a lot of details you miss. But if you drive the same route every day, every day, you begin to notice the little things. So remember that a lot of these little things are actually the beginning of big problems, and if you can catch them when they're small, you've accomplished a lot. When you improve your powers of observation like this, you're becoming more and more truthful, and again, making yourself worthy of the Dhamma.

So let that thought be uplifting. It lifts your intent, lifts your heart, so that you can put even more energy into the practice.