

In Accordance with the Dhamma

February 7, 2022

Ajaan Suwat commented several times that there were two Dhamma themes that Ajaan Mun would repeat again and again in his Dhamma talks. One was following the customs of the noble ones; the other was to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma.

We can take these as the basic principles of the practice—basic principles of the Forest tradition—that we're not here to change the Dhamma to suit our likes and dislikes. We're here to bend our likes in the direction of the Dhamma as it is.

In terms of practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, you may remember that this is mentioned in the sutta on the Buddha's passing away. He said: This is how you show respect for the Buddha, not with flowers and incense, but by practicing the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma. He said that as long as we do that, the world will not be empty of arahants. After all, that's what the teaching's all about: making sure that the path to arahantship is open; the path to the end of suffering is open. We keep that path open by not changing it.

Ajaan Suwat again: He made a comment once that when someone has reached the end of the path, then as far as he's concerned, weeds could grow on the path again. But then he looks back and he sees other people coming along the path, and he feels compassion for them. He also sees other people placing rocks and obstacles on the path, so he wants to clear those obstacles away.

The best way to keep the path open for the people who come after us, even if we haven't reached the end of the path ourselves, is to make sure that we don't make any changes in the path, cutting new paths off into the woods on either side of the Buddha's path. We keep the path going in the right direction.

There's a passage where the Buddha defines what it means to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma, and it's to practice for the sake of disenchantment, through disenchantment to dispassion, and through dispassion to release. The word for disenchantment, *nibbida*, is also the word used when you've had enough of a certain food. This fits in with the Buddha's teachings on

clinging, because the word for clinging, *upadana*, also means to feed.

We cling to form, we cling to feelings, perceptions, thought fabrications, consciousness, which means we feed on them, hoping to get some satisfaction out of them. As the Buddha points out, that's why we're suffering. So he wants us to gain a sense of having had enough of this kind of feeding. It's through having had enough that we gain release. This is why dispassion is one of the tests of what actually is Dhamma.

You see all sorts of scholarly theories about how you can tell what's Dhamma, what's not Dhamma by comparing the different versions of the suttas that you find in the Pali Canon, in the Chinese Canons, in the Tibetan Canons and whatnot. But just because something has made its way through the different Canons doesn't mean it necessarily is Dhamma. Or if something is found only in one Canon and not in the others, that doesn't mean it's not Dhamma. As the Buddha said, the way you test it has nothing to do with who said it. You test it by putting it into practice and seeing what results you get.

In those principles he gave to his stepmother as to what counts as Dhamma and what doesn't count as Dhamma, there are two that are related to the goal of the practice: You become dispassionate and you become unfettered. When you develop dispassion for the way you've been feeding, and you decide that you've had enough of this because it's not worth it, that's when you let go. And when you let go, you're freed. The fetters fall away.

This is why the Buddha used the image of a flame going out to illustrate the attainment of the goal: In those days they believed that fire, when it was lit, was clinging to its fuel, feeding on its fuel. The way to get the fire to go out was to get the fire to let go.

In other words, the fuel isn't holding on to the fire. The fire is trapped because *it's* holding on. In the same way, our minds are trapped by sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations, not because those things are trapping us—we're the one's trapping ourselves.

Which is why we have to be especially careful about not changing the Dhamma to fit in with our preconceived notions, because our preconceived notions, for the most part, tend to have feeding as their purpose. We want to keep

feeding on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. If anything gets in the way of that feeding, we want to change it.

We have to admit that, okay, we've been making a mistake. We're feeding on the wrong things, looking for happiness in the wrong way. So maybe we should listen to the Buddha and hear what he has to say.

So look at the life of Ajaan Mun. He made himself into Dhamma. It wasn't that he chose teachings because he liked them. He would submit himself. And the word *submit* is important here. You take these things on to guide you. You take them on to test them, but you give them a fair test.

Some people test things in a sloppy way. I've heard many people say, "Well, I tried meditating, and it didn't do anything for me, so there must be something wrong with meditation." Well, they meditated once or twice. Or even if they meditated for a long time, they didn't submit themselves to what was genuinely the Dhamma. So they were in no position to come to a fair judgment as to what works and what doesn't work. You really have to look at what the Dhamma has to say and really put it into practice if you want to really know.

Does it lead to dispassion? Does it lead to being unfettered? That's the Dhamma. And in testing the Dhamma, you're also testing yourself: Are you honest in the way you conduct the test? Are you fair? Have you really put in the effort? Because as the Buddha promised, it's going to take effort.

He says there are those whose practice is easy and fast, those whose practice is easy and slow, those whose practice is difficult and fast, and those whose practice is difficult and slow. You can't choose beforehand and say, "I think I'd like the easy and fast" or "I'd like the easy and slow." If it turns out that your practice will have to be difficult, okay, be willing to put up with the difficulties, because we're dealing with the question of true happiness here.

The Buddha claims that he found true happiness through his own efforts. And part of his claim is that it came through developing qualities like ardency, resolution, heedfulness, things that we all have to some extent, but things that we can all develop. So the implication is that we, too, can follow that path. We, too, can put an end to suffering. We live in a world where that possibility is open.

So we don't want to close off the door by saying, "Well, I'm not going to try,"

or “I don’t believe in it,” or “I don’t think it’ll work.” Look at yourself and ask yourself, “Have you suffered enough? How much more do you want to suffer before you’re ready to try the way out?” As the Buddha said, this *is* the way out.

This is what it means to practice the Dhamma in accordance with the Dhamma: Submit to the Dhamma, practicing it for the sake of disenchantment, for the sake of dispassion. That’s how we test what the Dhamma is; that’s how we test ourselves. And it’s a good test.

It doesn’t involve doing anything demeaning, and it doesn’t involve anything less than honorable, which is why the Buddha said that it’s admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. It’s good all the way through.