

Bringing Daily Life into the Practice

March 24, 2022

The question is often asked, how to bring the practice into daily life. And the best way to answer it is to switch the priorities around. Make the question: how to bring daily life into your practice. In other words, you want your practice to create the context, the frame, and then you allow certain parts of daily life into that context.

It's an important lesson in realizing how much your mind shapes your environment. All too often, we let our mind be shaped by what's around us, but *we* want to shape the environment. And we can. The media come at us with such force that it's often hard to realize that we should be in charge of our environment—what we take in, what we don't take in, and what we put into our environment.

You start with the precepts. You want to hold to the precepts no matter what. Don't let the world tell you that there are good reasons for breaking the precepts. Sometimes they'll try to get to you through fear of loss of wealth, loss of health, or the loss of your relatives. But, as the Buddha said, those kinds of loss are not really serious; you lose them and you can get them back. The serious losses are loss of your virtue and loss of right view. If you lose those, it's going to be a long time before you can get them back.

So, you don't want the four types of bias to influence you. In other words, you don't break the precepts for somebody's sake because you like them and want to please them, you don't break the precepts because there are people you don't like and you want to treat them unfairly, you don't want to break the precepts out of delusion, and you don't want to break them out of fear—fear of somebody's power. You've got to hold to the precepts no matter what.

Remember, you're trying to hold to precepts in a way that's pleasing to the noble ones. If you're going to please anybody in your observance of the precepts, try to please them, because they themselves have held by the precepts and have seen that they really are advantageous. So, always think of the noble ones watching over your shoulder.

This is where you bring in the principles of shame and compunction. The word "shame" has gotten bad press in the West for a long time now, but you have to remember that there are two kinds of shame: unhealthy shame, which is the opposite of pride, and then healthy shame, which is the opposite of shamelessness. The Buddha, of course, is advocating healthy shame. A shameless person doesn't care what other people think, even the best people in the world. But, if you're

wise, you want to keep the standards of the noble ones in mind and try to live up to them. You'll find that a lot of the principles for bringing the world into your practice require mindfulness. In this case, you're keeping the standards of the noble ones in mind in terms of your precepts.

This carries over into the next principle, which is restraint of the senses: being really careful about how you engage with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas—realizing, again, that your mind is what goes out and looks for trouble. If the mind were not actively involved in *wanting* to see and hear and engage with other senses, it wouldn't receive any input. There's an act of the mind that goes out to these things—flows out to these things, as they would say in Thai—and you want to watch for that.

Who's flowing out? Your greed and your anger? Or your discernment? You want your discernment to be the strongest flow, so that when you look at things, you can take them apart and see where they might draw you into lust or anger or greed or fear. Then remind yourself: You don't have to be drawn in that way. Again, have a sense of your own power. Don't let yourself be overpowered by influences from outside.

Sensory input is not a given. Remember that it's a construct. There's the kamma of how you watch, the kamma of how you listen, and so on, so you want to look at (1) the intention and (2) the result. Then, in line with the principle that the Buddha taught to Rahula, if you see that the way you engage is causing trouble—causing harm to yourself or others—you go back and figure out: What's a different, less harmful way of looking? What's a less harmful way of listening?

If you just keep on exercising your greed and your other defilements as you engage with the senses, they're going to get strong. When they're strong, they move in on your meditation. So remember, as you go through the day engaging the senses, you're practicing meditation. You have to have the same vigilance over what your mind is doing—where it's going and where it's coming from—that you would while you're sitting here with your eyes closed.

Another important principle for bringing the world into your practice is moderation in your conversation. Remember Ajaan Fuang's comment that "If something's not necessary, why say it?" Get some control over your mouth.

Then think of the Buddha's standards for saying things: (1) It would have to be true, (2) it would have to be beneficial, and then (3), it would have to be in line with the right time and place to say pleasing things, or the right time and place to say displeasing things.

Here again, don't let your fear of other people get in the way of your sense of what is the right time and place to talk to them in those ways, because what you

talk about as you go through the day will be reverberating in your mind as you sit down to meditate. So, be careful about what you say, and how and when you say it.

If you treat your words as if they have value—in other words, hand them out slowly, in a parsimonious way—other people will begin to value them as well. If you gush out with a big flood of words that goes on and on and on, after a while, it means nothing. People don't value it. So, show that you value your words, and you find that other people will listen more carefully. At the same time, your speech becomes a good influence on your meditation.

What the Buddha calls verbal fabrication is something you're engaging in all the time: directed thought and evaluation. Every time you speak, you first have to choose a topic and then make a mental comment on it. You'll be bringing those two habits, or those two skills, into your concentration, so make sure they're well trained before you apply them to concentration. You'll find that your practice will go a lot more smoothly.

The fourth principle is seclusion. You've *got* to find time to be off by yourself, away not only from other people but also from your devices, being able to look at your own mind, so that you're not constantly subject to the chatter and the allure of things from outside. You want to see the mind on its own terms. You want to keep in touch with it day after day after day, as much as you can, so that you can keep your grounding. And remind yourself that seclusion is the context.

When the Buddha talks about seclusion, it's not just physical seclusion. He also talks about mental seclusion, when you're secluded from your defilements, secluded from unskillful states—in other words, when you get the mind into concentration, so that it can watch itself on its own terms. You can watch the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, mind in and of itself, dhammas in and of themselves.

You're going to have to become really familiar with these things because, when death comes, this is what you'll be dealing with, and you want to be able to deal with these things on these terms—in other words, the body in the context of the body, not the body in the context of the world and the narrative about how this body's going to have to die and leave the world. Or your feelings, again, in the context of feelings, not in the context of the world.

This is why I said you want to make sure the practice forms the context: because, as you maintain this context, you're in touch with your refuge. You keep yourself safe, because it helps you see things in terms of their true nature—what's really important, what's only of secondary importance. When you don't allow the

narratives of the world to come and get in the way, the mind will be a lot more stable. And a lot more secure.

This then, of course, connects with the last of the principles, which is right view. You start with right view about kamma and rebirth in general, thinking about what those principles say about your life. If you think that life ends with death and that's it—there's nothing more—then that's going to put everything else in your daily life into one context. But if you think of samsara as something that's going to lead on for more and more and more lives, then your actions take on a different meaning.

You want to keep that larger context in mind, so that you can have a clear idea: What really is worth doing? What's not worth doing? When you start getting attached to ideas, memories, material things, you can remind yourself, "Okay, you've had these things before, you've let go of them before, and you've come back to them again, and you're setting yourself up to miss them again. Haven't you had enough?"

If you think everything ends with death, there's never any sense of enough. You want to grab as much as you can before you go. But, if you realize that you're going to keep coming back, back, back, back again, and you've been through this many, many times—and what do you have to show for it? That changes things. As the Buddha said, you've shed more tears than there is water in the ocean. So, keep that larger context in mind.

What this comes down to, of course, is those first three principles: following the precepts, restraint in terms of your speech, restraint of the senses. Those come under virtue—training in heightened virtue. Seclusion comes under training in heightened mind, or concentration. And then, right view comes in training in heightened discernment.

So, you're taking this triple training and you're making *this* the framework of your life. Then you can judge which parts of your life as you've been living it so far fit into that framework and which ones don't. You can sort things out that way.

In some cases, it's going to require some radical changes in how you've been living, but it's all to the good, because when you put everything in the context of the practice, then what you do and say and think, even when you're not meditating, becomes part of the development of your perfections—those qualities that sustain you and that lead to the further shore.

So, put your daily life in the right context, and your actions will take on a new meaning. Instead of pulling off in different directions, they head toward a happiness that you really want—that's really worth wanting—as long as you keep your priorities straight.