Overcoming the Taints by Using

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 19:52

Good evening. I trust you've had a fruitful day. I do not say happy, but I do hope it has been happy. The sun's come out too.

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble, and fully self-awakened one.

So we're still struggling through the taints. There's seven of them, the seven ways of overcoming the taints. So we've done the first one, which is all about *vipassanā*, really, and seeing this whole business of the self, of identity. Then we did by restraining. So we're now on to abandon by using.

The taint should be abandoned by seeing, restraining, by using, by enduring, by avoiding, by removing, and finally by developing. So we've moved from seeing to restraining. So we're now on to abandon by using.

What taint should be abandoned by using? Here, now remember that these discourses are remembered by the monastics and basically for monastics. So we have to translate it into daily life.

Using the robe only for protection from the cold, from protection from heat, from contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, the creeping things, and only for the purpose of concealing the private parts. Very forward, isn't he? So here he's given us the reason for wearing clothes, right, obviously for protection, warmth of the body and so on and so forth. But not for really for anything else.

Now, that doesn't particularly work for lay people. You've got to dress according to where you are at work, at play with the family and so on and so forth. But there's an interesting thing that happened when the order was first established. When people joined him both monks and nuns, they would go to the charnel grounds. And dead bodies then were wrapped up in white cloth and just left, left to be eaten by wild animals, etc. And it was the general custom of the *samaṇas*, these people who had left the lay life to live an ascetic life with various teachers. It was the custom to go and take this cloth and turn it into robes, and sew little bits together to make a lower robe and an upper robe.

Now, the first thing was that he himself decided that it didn't look so good. So he asked the monks to cut the pieces so that when the robe was laid out, it looked like paddy fields. So if you ever see a monk's robe laid out, you'll see that there are large patches for the paddy and little passages all around it. And they're all measured out. They're all meant to be of a certain measure. And that way the robes didn't look so untidy.

On top of that, he asked them to dye it in the *arakan*, which gives it a sort of light brown colour. And that's why monks' robes and nuns' robes are all this some form of shade of brown, warm brown, red brown, all that. And it all comes back to the Buddha wanting his order to look neat.

So it's not as though he's saying you should just wear scruffy clothes. You should wear things that you feel comfortable with, both from the point of view of the climate and the situation you're in, but also in terms of how it fits your understanding of, shall we say, natural beauty, not something forced constantly by fashion, constantly changing by fashion, although that has obviously something to do with it. But it's again this wonderful practicality that the Buddha has, constantly asking, what are clothes for?

And then, of course, there's the amount of clothes that we have, and that's to do with what is need rather than greed, or what is, shall we say, allowable by just common sense. So one needs various pair of shoes in the West. In the East, a monk or nun might just get away with slippers. Some actually go barefoot. But here you need, if you want to go walking, you need boots and then you need slippers and then you need shoes, you need all sorts of things. So it's all to do with where we are, but being practical, being practical.

And modesty, of course, runs high in the Buddhist teachings because we're trying to reduce the desire for our sexual appetite. So that's why nuns and monks especially robe themselves in very loose robes so that the body is not so obvious. So that's this business of wearing robes. These paragraphs that I'll be reading are chanted by monks as a reminder.

Then we come to alms food. He uses alms food neither for amusement or for intoxication, nor for the sake of physical beauty or attractiveness, but only for the endurance and continuance of this body for ending discomfort, for ending discomfort and for assisting in the holy life. Considering thus, I shall terminate old feelings without arousing new feelings and I shall be healthy, blameless and shall live in comfort.

So here again, it's just the practicality of eating for the nourishment of the body. Now, you have to be careful. He didn't tell lay people what to offer him. If he went to kings, if he was invited by kings or rich people, they would obviously give him very special dishes. And he never complained about that. That was an offering that they could give. So he was quite happy to receive it. On the other hand, if he was wandering just in ordinary villages, he might have some very basic food. And of course, at that time, they had famines.

When I went out to Thailand, for instance, I was up at Wat Phanana Shack, just for a visit. I was there for about two weeks. And we would go off on alms round. And I also did it with Ajahn Mahabua's place up in the northeast. And we went on our round to the villages in the morning. And basically, all we were offered was what they could, which was rice, with little bits of meat sometimes, a bit of fish or something. Basically, it was just rice. And it was only when we got back to the monastery that the local richer middle class had supplied us with abundant food.

So there's a huge disparity as it is everywhere in the world these days between the rich and the poor. But

there would have been times during the Buddha's time when there were actual famines. And the mendicants would have been right at the end of the line, of course, except for devotees. That was the devotee would obviously try to make sure that the people whom they honored would have enough food.

But again, it's not eating for any other purpose. That's the real thing for the nourishment of the body. Now, it doesn't mean to say that the food has to be plain or horrible. It's just that that's where your intention is, to feed, nourish the body for the purpose of spiritual practice. That doesn't mean to say that you can't cook yourself a pleasant meal.

So these days where many of us are in isolation, that's one way of raising your heart, raising your spirit to make an effort to cook for yourself, to care for yourself and to give something which is appetizing. How much you eat, of course, will be determined by feeding your appetite or feeding your greed. So that's the distinction we have to make. What we eat is not so important. And the whole thing is, of course, is to reduce this greed.

Now, remember that often we eat not just because we enjoy it and indulge it because of that, but also we're hiding from ourselves feelings that we don't want. So many, many of you, shall we say, who are living completely alone in isolation, might find the evenings difficult, loneliness might come, a bit of depression, etc. And one way that we seek is, of course, to get up a toast, buttered toast. I mean, well, that is the cure. But unfortunately, it hides from us these painful mental states.

So what is better to do is to sit with that for a while, to sit with it and wait for it to exhaust itself or at least to diminish, to diminish. And then to, as it were, congratulate ourselves that we haven't just given into it to try and get rid of it. We can then congratulate ourselves with a piece of toast. See, you can rejoice that you overcame a negative reason for having toast. You're now celebrating.

Feast days are there for celebration. It's a way of expressing joy or praise or wonder. It's a way of thanking everybody. So in Buddhist countries there are two main times which is Buddha Day where we're celebrating the life of the Buddha and that's coming up. I mean, we would have run a course now at the beginning of May, but for this virus. And that's a place where we would celebrate. So people bring lovely food, not only for the monastics, but for themselves. And the other time is the Sangha Day, the *Kaṭhina*, where the *Sangha* is celebrated. And that's normally a time when people bring things that the *Sangha* might need. So these two occasions are, shall we say, a community effort to celebrate and food is very much part of it. So there's nothing wrong with feasting. That's what I say anyway.

So then we go on to reflecting wisely. It's always a reflecting. Remember this, there's been some *yoniso manasikāra*. It's a very constant phrase of the Buddha, just to sit and think about things, to reflect upon things. He uses a resting place only for protection from cold, for protection from heat, protection from gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, creeping things, and only for the purpose of warding off the perils of climate and for enjoying retreat.

So here he's talking about a place where you stay. So in the East, the monks can be happy with just a little hut somewhere. I was very fortunate when I stayed at Kenda Boulder. I had an eight foot by five foot. That's about two and a half metres by one and three quarter metres, little space there. It was very comfortable. All I needed was a bed and a chair. And that was about it. And that was enough for that particular time. Now, of course, I need mobiles and all sorts of silly things. But in those days, it was extremely simple.

And that simplicity brings with it a great sense of peace. You don't have to worry about anything. You don't have to worry about whether you have Wi-Fi or not. And again, to be very practical. What's the purpose of your house, of your flat? What's the purpose of your room? What's the purpose of it? And to keep it very simple. As soon as we add things, as soon as we make things more complicated, then the worries come, the worry of loss and all that. So try and keep things simple by reflecting what's the purpose of a dwelling? What is the purpose of this room? What's the purpose of my bedroom?

And enjoying retreats, well, that of course is a monastic thing about seclusion, not isolation. But it's always good, remember, to have a regular place in your house, in your flat, wherever you're living, which you have partitioned off in some way where you go to in order to practice, in order to meditate. That also helps with creating this habit because it's there as a place. It's the same as when we have temples or here where we have the *stupa*. They remind you. It's there. If you have a statue, if you like statues, but definitely some place in the house where you have established a certain atmosphere. So that's important.

And then finally, of course, to use wisely medicinal requisites only for the protection of arisen afflicting feelings and for the benefit of good health. So again, medicine, to use it for the benefit of the body. This one I think is easy enough to understand.

But often we are, these days we've become very neurotic about things. I never used to take vitamin pills. Now I'm taking vitamin pills and quercetin. I'm just piling this stuff into my body and I'm coming to a point where I must, I've determined to stop all that stuff because the body knows how to care for itself. And if it's not in a good way, then it'll tell you. The food we get, people complain about it, this and that in it. But the fact is that generally speaking, we're living longer. And we're living more healthy. So we must have got something right.

And usually a lot of diseases that we have are caused by not eating the right things, by eating sugary things. That's why we've got all this diabetes stuff. So I don't think it's so much to do with the food. I'm sure I can hear many of you complaining about that now. But in my understanding, I have no complaint with the food that we get from the shops.

So seeing food as medicine, that's the other thing too. Food as a nourishment for the body, that's also part of this. Of course, that will remind us of this special medicine, *Ayurvedic* medicine, of which, if you remember, there was the story of the Zen monk who was cured with cow's urine. Fermented, fermented cow's urine, yeah? So make sure it's fermented when you get some, okay?

So the taints which create vexation and fever might arise in one who does not use these requisites wisely. So it's a case of being careful how we use things. Now, you can extend this to everything you use: the television, the mobile, your computer. Why are you using it at this time? What are you looking at? What's the purpose of it? And make sure that it is actually for *Dhamma* purposes. Now, if it's not for *Dhamma* purposes, if it's for something that you see as unwholesome, be truthful to yourself, be truthful to ourselves.

When I'm doing something which I know, I know it's not quite right, it's like, I know it's quite, there will be consequences, there will be consequences. And it's being truthful to ourselves about what we're doing. And if we see that we're doing something which is not good for us, just keep making the resolution, make the resolution, make the resolution. And eventually it comes through, yeah?

But remember, with all these things that are tempting, it's always good to try and just sit with the feeling of it, sit with the feeling of it and wait for it to exhaust itself. And then it gives you a feeling of power that you can actually control these habits. That's also important.

So we've completed today the abandoning of these taints by using things wisely. So this obviously only refers to certain things that we have and use. So we'll carry on tomorrow to the next one because each one has something to teach us.

So I hope that's been useful in some way and that you've not found it completely useless. And I think it's time for us to do some meditation.

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