The Eight Worldly Winds

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Bhante Bodhidhamma · 20:57

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and fully self-awakened one.

This month, I've chosen these *Aṭṭhalokadahamā*, these eight worldly conditions, concerns, winds, fortunes, vicissitudes. It's the ups and downs of life. That's basically what it is.

So this is what the Buddha says. Gain obsesses the mind and loss obsesses the mind. Fame obsesses the mind and disrepute obsesses the mind. Blame obsesses the mind and praise obsesses the mind. Pleasure obsesses the mind and pain obsesses the mind. They are attracted to gain and repelled by loss. They are attracted to fame and repelled by disrepute. They are attracted to praise and repelled by blame. They are attracted to pleasure and repelled by pain. Thus involved with attraction and repulsion, they are not freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection and anguish. They are not freed from suffering, I say.

So that's the eight worldly conditions. Now, when we look at those conditions, you can see that they all arise out of a notion of a self. It's me that's blamed. It's me that's praised. And when we do that, it just creates mental turbulence. When this happens at a societal level, then you can see communities being split, as we see these days. And when it gets to an international level, well, there's always war going on.

So what's it like to be freed of these worldly concerns? In the discourse on the greatest blessings, the Buddha has stated how an awakened Arahant, how somebody who's fully liberated is unmoved by one of the eight worldly conditions. And he describes this as one of the great blessings. It says that a mind unshaken by worldly vicissitudes, sorrowless, stainless and secure, this is the greatest blessing. And we can extend that to families and countries and we might just get to a peaceful world.

What I've done is just made up questions around these eight factors to give some idea of how we can use them to reflect on the way we are with these fortunes and misfortunes. So if we take gain, for instance, we ask ourselves, what am I obsessing about? What sort of an accumulation am I gathering? What collections do I have? Wealth, power, even though we might not have much wealth at all or indeed hardly any power. The point is this obsession about it, control. How much energy do we give to it? And how much time do we waste brooding and planning over these sorts of things?

And then once we can bring a past event to mind as a practice, we can get in touch with that feeling, that craving, that holding on, the cramped grip. What does that feel like? And to try and separate that from what you might call just an ordinary wholesome desire. I mean, we need money, we need friends. But

there's a way of having that without that obsessiveness.

And then there's loss. And everybody feels that. You might lose your job. What does that feel like? If you have lost your job in the past, how did that feel? The despair, the confusion, the anxiety, panic? So much depends upon our work and the wage that we have. And then there's the self-worth that we have from our work, the sense of status. But we'll come to that a bit later.

So we have to ask ourselves, what if I let go of that? What if I just let go of the obsessiveness and just be more content with what I have? And by going to a past occasion and investigating it and reflecting on it, it just helps us to be prepared for the next time. So we're not so shocked when we lose things, lose our work, lose money on the horses and stuff like that.

So the next one is praise. Again, we look back and we think, well, what have I done or said, or am doing or saying which has an underlying demand for praise, for admiration, for compliments, for appreciation? How does that feel? Is it necessary? And how does that reflect on ourselves and how we're judging ourselves? And how we feel embarrassed when we suddenly realise that we've said something or done something just to be praised, just to be admired. And what would have happened if you hadn't had that intention in that particular case? And what should the attitude have been?

When it comes to blame, well, nobody likes that. Nobody likes to be blamed for anything. And again, to bring up an occasion in the past where we've been blamed and we've been judged and we've been criticized, and just to get to the hurt of that and how we reacted. And sometimes we react silently within ourselves. We spend hours getting our own back in these fantasies, throwing people on fires and chucking them off bridges and things like that.

So it's getting in touch with those feelings and naming them for what they are. What is it like to be humiliated? Instead of hiding that from ourselves, suppressing it because of our pride, it's to let it up, to let up and just feel it and to know that if I can just allow these things to manifest, they're actually dying out. They're actually curing.

And some of these things are very difficult. The hurt, the humiliation really hurts the ego. It really punches the self. And if we're afraid of criticism, does that make us timid? Does that make us timid? And then when we have been blamed and it has been our fault, have we been humble enough to accept that and try and do something about it and not let that rumble on afterwards about self-criticism? I'm such a fool. I'm an idiot. How could I have done that? It's just being able to let go, to let go of something.

And then we have the area of success and failure. So again, it's much the same thing. You bring to mind a past occasion when you feel you've been successful, a job well done. And there's nothing wrong with appropriate congratulations. But again, it's this business of hanging on to that success.

I've got here just what the Buddha says about somebody who becomes an Arahant. He says that someone who's an Arahant with their taints — taints are the roots of all our defilements, a craving for pleasure,

craving to become, and ignorance, the basic ignorance of self. And these are the roots from which all these defilements arise. So he says when those are destroyed, and has lived the holy life, done what has to be done, laid down the burden, reached the goal, destroyed the fetters of becoming, and is completely liberated through final desire. So you can see it's that sense of completion. What had to be done has been done. And if you look at your life where you've really completed something, it's done, it's finished, it's gone. There's a sense of joy about that.

And lay down the burden, the sense of relief of laying down the burden, laying down the burden of being a human being, basically. And the taste of *Nibbāna* is the joy of freedom. So that's where we're heading. It's good to remind ourselves about that.

And when we are praised, we tend to personalize things. So immediately it's not the job that's being praised. It's me. I'm amazing. I get very big headed. And sometimes if you catch yourself like that, if you catch yourself being big headed and full of self praise and all that, then again becomes a sort of — and you notice that other people are seeing it as big headedness. And that again produces a sense of shame within us.

So all these things, just recognize all the ego stuff as unnecessary evaluation tags. Just let them fade away. And eventually, as the Buddha said, they just fall off.

Failure. So a job didn't turn out well, a relationship sadly ended. How's it feel not to achieve something, even if you've put a lot of work into it and it just hasn't happened? So again you get this personalization. The job failed, therefore I'm a failure. The relationship failed, so I'm unlovable.

And it's reflecting on that and recognizing that those personalizations of things are just not necessary. They just add suffering to it. And if it was a genuine mistake or whatever, we can be realistic about it and to make sure that we don't repeat that same mistake. But then again, circumstances change. We don't have that total control anymore.

And finally, there's pleasure and pain. So pleasure, both mental and physical pleasure. We're always seeking that. We're always trying to be in that pleasurable state. But it's a case of not attaching to it, not making it something that is repeatable. So when we have something joyful, something pleasant, to accept that it's come to an end and there's no need to go any further with it, and to find out how we experience desire.

So sometimes, for instance, when it comes to food, you don't feel hungry, so you're not attracted so much to the cake. But sometimes when you are hungry, you can't stop yourself from eating the whole cake. So there's something about desire which is separate from seeing something that is pleasant. There's that movement towards it of wanting, wanting, wanting. And then to make that distinction between the desire and the action.

So remember, in Buddhist psychology, this is really crucial because when something is a desire, nothing's

actually happened. It's just potential. But as soon as you decide to let that energy go and produce something, a thought or speech, something that you do, there becomes an action. And that action goes out into a matrix of relationships on the outside, but it also moves into the inner matrix of our psyche. And that's what we've been by *kamma*, action.

So we're trying to make a distinction here between indulgence and enjoyment. And we do that, and the Buddha's always on about this, by restraining ourselves. That's very difficult in our society. We're not expected to restrain. In fact, everybody wants us to indulge. But the act of restraint gets us in touch with the unacceptable level, you might say, from a Dharma point of view of desire. So in other words, nothing's wrong with appetite. Everything's wrong with greed.

And then finally pain. So pain can be very difficult. And I think one of the things we have to be careful of here is that we don't take what pain comes to us as some sort of karmic resolve. I deserve the pain. We're not in charge of the body and the body has its own weaknesses. And sometimes when the pain comes, it's to do with genetics. It's not to do with the person themselves.

So it's up to us to decide whether this pain is something that I want to work with. So you're working with it in terms of getting that right relationship with pain of patience, understanding what pain is at different levels. At one level, at the basic level of contact, pain is just sensation. It's when it becomes a feeling, when it's acknowledged as a feeling that you get the sense of pain and then you get that reaction of not wanting it. But if you can't do that sort of investigation and you haven't got the patience for it, then take an aspirin, do something.

I was just thinking then of the Act of Parliament that we've had, well, it's not completely passed, about assisted dying. And it's an area which Buddhists have to really think about and where they are personally with that. And when pain gets to a point which cannot be assuaged by any of the morphines and all that sort of stuff, then one has to decide for oneself whether it's a time to put an end to one's life and whatnot. And there are various degrees of understanding as to what is right and what is wrong. But ultimately, it's the individual. It's for them to feel OK with it. So that's a big topic, that.

So again, going back to the Buddha. When gain arises for an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person, they do not reflect. Gain has arisen for me. It is inconstant, stressful and subject to change. They do not discern it as it has come to be. So that's what's missing. We presume that once I've got something, it's just going to grow, that it's not going to leave me. But it's a good thing to be able to remind oneself that whatever I have received, which is bringing me joy, pleasure, this too will pass.

So one of the things I try to remind people to do is that after lunch to say to yourself, well, this is one less lunch in this lifetime. We can measure our lives by how many lunches we have, how many breakfasts we have.

And then those people who are not instructed, they welcome, they grab hold of an arisen gain and rebel

against an arisen loss. And so it's the same with status and disgrace, with praise and blame and with pleasure and pain. As they are thus engaged in welcoming and rebelling, they are not released from birth, aging and death, from sorrows, lamentations, pain, distresses and despairs. They are not released, I tell you, from suffering and unhappiness.

And those who are awakened, those who have developed to some degree, then they don't welcome it in that sense of wanting to indulge it. They just receive it. And this is the difference, he says, the distinction. This is the distinguishing factor between a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones and an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person.

So what's this underlying attitude that we're trying to develop to all these worldly conditions? It's equanimity. And this comes about more and more as identity becomes, about a self becomes less and less. The less we personalize things, the more we find ourselves at ease with the way things are. And it's this sense of self which is producing all the problems.

And we undermine that by reminding ourselves what the correct, or should we say, the more wholesome, skillful attitude ought to be. And it's a working process. I wouldn't talk about progress. Don't get involved with progress. Just get involved with process. How do I get rid of these wrong attitudes that I have to these eight worldly winds, which are going to happen anyway in my life? We're not going to stop it.

So it's one of the attractions of the Buddha's teachings that he really has also buried his teachings as well into daily life. So it's not just meditation and beautiful mental states and developing *mettā* from the heart. It's actually driving us into right action, right eightfold path, right speech, right action and right livelihood. And one of the things we have to do is just be able to handle these eight worldly winds.

Very good. I hope that these words have been of some assistance. They have not caused confusion. And that by your careful investigation of these eight worldly winds, you will soon be liberated from all suffering. Sooner rather than later.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.