

Celibacy

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

To coin a Churchillian phrase: some are born celibate, some have celibacy thrust upon them and some grow into celibacy. (Churchill had said this of greatness.) In more religious times and even now in Buddhist countries, a woman may boast she is still a virgin. And a man is not considered any less a man who joins the Sangha as a child or young teenager and never has any sexual encounter throughout their lives. How strange to a Westerner. Sounds even perverse. A life without sex! But we fail to remember that the 'sexual revolution' of the 60's is not that long ago. And such has been the sexualising of our society – with easy pornography – that even children are caught up in lust - and themselves lusted. No-one needs sex. It's not like food. And since sexual desire is probably our greatest driver, can you imagine the relief when you are no longer hounded by sexual cravings as someone with OCD may feel when relieved of their compulsion. And can you imagine the energy released for other purposes? For those who find themselves temporarily celibate, take the opportunity to find out how it feels when you let go of lustful thoughts. As with all acts of renunciation, you have to resist the fantasies and suffer the desire, feel it in the body, till the compulsive need exhausts itself completely to feel the release, the relief and the joy of liberation – even if only once! And there is romance which blossoms often into an intimate relationship. This is also forsaken in celibacy. To someone seeking a greater love, such love is confining. There are also all the other loves - parent and child, friend with friend, even spiritual friendships and so on – all will have some psychological dependency. This 'attachment' is not to be seen as evil, but unskillful. It has unwanted consequences. Such loves cannot be universal by definition. True universal love arises when there are no particulars. And this can only be arrived at through relinquishing particulars. The Buddha says our love should go out to the whole world, ourselves included, without any hatred or preference. In other words, whoever we meet within that given moment, whether we like them or not or whether they like us or not, they are focus of our goodwill. Such will not be perfectly possible to do till the delusive sense of self which creates fences is taken down. But we can begin the process of dismantling them. When we are with someone, let us give them our full attention with the desire to know where they are coming from, how they feel, what they are saying. And at the same time to be aware of the background of reactions and responses that arise within us. To develop an affectionate awareness. And respond from the heart of goodwill. In this way we can all in given moments, unhindered by erotic, romantic or specific loves, be 'celibate'. For this is the reason for celibacy – to develop unhindered love. Difficult! Ponderings: Why do you think the Buddha did not return to his family and the household life after his Enlightenment? Why did he create a celibate institution, the monastic Sangha? How might you practice celibacy within a relationship?

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