

What's Wrong with a Bit of Attachment!

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Attachment is one of those hackneyed words that crop up over and over again in Buddhist literature. They used to talk about being ‘detached’, but that sounded really hard and cold. So now you will read ‘non-attached’. The word they are referring to is *taṇhā* which is usually translated as ‘clinging’. It all refers to a type of relationship we have with the world. The world as we experience it through the senses and the mind. Now we always have to remember that the Buddha’s teaching is only concerned with suffering and unsatisfactoriness and the end of it. The end of it is happiness. So we could say that the Dhamma is all about attaining happiness. But that would be wrong. Indeed that’s what the Buddha, before his liberation from suffering was trying to do, either by way of ecstatic mental states or self-mortification. But the fact of the matter is that happiness is always there. It simply needs to be discovered. That thick sticky layer of attachment has to go and lo and betide, there’s happiness – and it has been there all the time. Happiness here refers to any amount of quiet joy, resonating compassion, warm love or sublime equanimity. And for this to appear from beneath the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of life all we have to do is drop the attachment. Yes, of course, easier said than done. But we will do it once we realise that it is because of suffering. The Buddha’s the Second Noble Truth: the cause of suffering and unsatisfactoriness is *taṇhā*. Attachments mean that we believe that our happiness is dependent on something or someone. It causes us to cling to it and defend it against loss. While we are indulging ourselves, there’s no problem. It’s a sensual Nibbana. Consider how we ‘lose ourselves’ in a film, in a hobby, in our work, in food, in sex and in romantic love. But what happens when we can’t get what we want? Is there not frustration? Is there not grief should we lose our delight? Is there not an abiding anxiety of possible loss, of fear of someone or something taking it away? And there’s the compulsive need, the overbearing habit demands gratification. We are truly enslaved. And then we get fed up with it. We get bored and then have to go in search of another excitement. If greed fuels the consumerist society, the escape from boredom is the unacknowledged accelerator. So the first thing to do to rid ourselves of this suffering is to contemplate these facts till they really sink in. And even then keep contemplating them. Then at the beginning and end of every delightful experience, acknowledge it has arisen and passed away and will never return. It is more dead than Monty Python’s parrot. And finally, the Buddha advises us to develop the attitude of ‘no preference’. ‘How do you like your tea?’ ‘As it comes.’

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