

Aim and Objective in Present Time

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Our concept of time is linear. We believe we are coming from a past, stop for a moment in the present and head off into the future. Historically speaking this is true. We can point to a past happening and we can predict to some extent what will happen in the future. These views can be considered as conventional. From a personal point of view, time is a way we structure events. If I said to you, I went for a walk yesterday afternoon, you would be able to position that walk in time – about so many hours ago. Not today. Not tomorrow. All this is useful for daily living, but it can be a barrier to experiencing time in a liberated way. In what way do we liberate ourselves from time? First of all it is to acknowledge that time does not actually exist. It is a concept whereby we organise past, present and future events. It's not that we want to get rid of the concept. If we did, we would be utterly disorientated. But we need to recognise the disconnection with actual present events that may come with it. This moment is sandwiched between what I think happened in the past (memories are never absolutely accurate) and what I presume will happen in the future. So I am either being compelled to act in a certain way determined by a past decision or I am acting in a way dictated by a future I imagine or expect. In this way, I am never living in the present moment as it is right now. When I am behaving like this, I am not in contact with the way things really are. In fact I find myself often in conflict with what is actually happening or manipulating what is happening to realise a future event. I'm neither living in the future nor experiencing the present moment as it is. One way we can bring ourselves into present time is to make a distinction between aim and objective. Supposing we have to go to the dentist. (I prefer uplifting examples.) When I set off the aim is to get to the dentist on time. The objective is to stay mindful of what is happening every moment of the way. This may also include any anxiety about being late or thoughts about what may happen. This way we are always living in the present even though we may be experiencing the consequences of past action and the effects of future action. In other words, it is to live in the immediacy of the present moment. Catch yourself opening a door. Are you already in the other room? Catch yourself brushing your teeth. Are you in a hurry to get it over with, so you can launch yourself into bed? How many times have you set out on a journey and arrived at where you are going whether driving or public transport without any awareness of the journey? How many times have you 'misaid' your keys? If we see how frequent is the number of missed present moments, we'll want to do something about it.

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