

One of the Hindrances is Sceptical Doubt

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 1 min read

Sceptical doubt stops us doing anything. First time on a diving board and we doubt we can do it. It is fear, of course, that is rationalising. So you climb down. Applying for a job, a job for which you doubt you have the ability. The mind offers a rational argument for your fear of failure. You doubt whether the person you love, can really love you, carbuncles and all, so you delay ... and delay for fear of rejection. And they find someone else. Sometimes you have to make a leap of faith. This is easier if we abandon the notion that life is a series of successes and failures, and instead see it as an exploration - a series of trial and errors. Then we can jump. We can 'fail'. We can try again. So it is with the Buddha's Dhamma. We may have all sorts of doubts. Doubts in the Teaching, in the practice, in the teacher and most often in ourselves. There are also many teachings which may be difficult for us: not-self, karma and rebirth, transcendence and Nibbana, no personal, all-loving God. If we allow these doubts to overwhelm us, we will stop the practice. We will commit spiritual suicide! Yet the Buddha does ask us to have doubt - an honest doubt. It is the wonder of the philosopher. This wonder, this curiosity will overcome any fears we have. And fears there will be as we explore our unknown inner territory. For the Buddha did not ask us to believe what he said, but question it. And he gave us a process on how to investigate - vipassana. To question not intellectually, but experientially. To discover whether his teachings are true for us. This very exploration is the process of liberation for it dissolves our delusions. This exploration demands we overcome our sceptical doubts. Such doubts often arise also when we are asked to abandon our cherished certainties. But do we know whether these certainties are true by our own experience? Or are they rather beliefs we have unquestionably accepted on the word of others, of family tradition, of culture? Can we remain in that place of 'don't know', 'not sure'. After all, why come to a conclusion anyway when in truth we don't actually know whether it is true or not by our own personal experience.

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