

Overcoming the Taints by Removing - Part 1

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 11:04

I just realized I had the sound off. Anyway, you saw me chanting and wishing you a greeting and hoping you had a fruitful day. So we'll start again.

Back on the old taints. Just as a reminder, we've got the taints. These are the *āsava*. Remember the underlying washes of our mental states, and they manifest through defilements. Some should be abandoned by seeing — that was when we were discussing this whole business of not-self. Should be abandoned by restraining. Abandoned by using — that was things like food and stuff like that. Abandoned by enduring — yes, there are certain things that all we can do is bear with them until they pass. And then we avoid them. We avoid certain places that are too tempting for us. And now we have abandoned by removing.

So let me just read the passage. What taints should be abandoned by removing? Here a *bhikkhu* — remember the *bhikkhu* refers to anybody listening — reflecting wisely. So don't forget he's very big on wise reflection. Does not tolerate an arisen thought of sensual desire. He abandons it, he removes it, he does away with it, he annihilates it. He does not tolerate an arisen thought of ill will, an arisen thought of cruelty. He does not tolerate it. He abandons it, he removes it, does away with them and annihilates them.

While taints, vexation and fever — so vexation, remember, is the vexation fever referred to the two sides of desire, wanting, not wanting — might arise in one who does not remove these thoughts. There are no taints, vexation or fever in one who removes them. These are called the taints that should be abandoned by removing.

So now we have to move again to a different discourse where this is explained in greater detail. This is number 19 of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the middle length sayings, and it's *Dvedhāvitakka*. Now *vitakka* just means thinking. So that's important. *Vitakka* just means thinking, as opposed to emoting, thinking.

This is the Blessed One. He was speaking again at Jetavana, Jeta's Grove. Remember the place that Anāthapiṇḍika, this rich businessman, bought for him. And he says, "Venerable Sir," they replied. The Blessed One said, "Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisattva, it occurred to me, 'Supposing I divide my thoughts into two classes.' Then I set on one side thoughts of sensual desire, thoughts of ill will and thoughts of cruelty. And I set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will and thoughts of non-cruelty."

So here we have the Bodhisattva. Remember, that's what we call somebody who has made a determination to become a fully self-awakened Buddha. That's different from the Mahāyāna, where

everybody takes the Bodhisattva vow. In Theravāda, they're very specific. Sometimes people do it in this very lifetime. Others remember during their meditation that they've made this vow in the past life. Perhaps we can give you examples of that some other time, but we'll stick to this discourse.

So when he says, "and set on the other side thoughts of renunciation, non-ill will and non-cruelty," the Buddha often likes the negative form, telling you what's not there. So obviously here he's referring to *mettā*, goodwill and compassion, not cruelty.

"As I abided thus, diligent, ardent and resolute" — so we've come across this little trilogy before: diligent, ardent and resolute — "a thought of sensual desire arose in me and I understood thus: this thought of sensual desire has arisen in me. This leads to my own affliction, to others' affliction and to the affliction of both. It obstructs wisdom, causes difficulties and leads away from *Nibbāna*."

"This leads to my own affliction" — when he thought this leads to my own affliction, it subsided in me. In other words, as soon as I recognized the thought was doing me harm, the desire to indulge it began to fall away, subsided. When I considered that it leads to other people's affliction, and then also that desire subsided in me — well, that's the compassion bit, isn't it? And when I considered this leads to the affliction of both, in the same way it subsided in me.

So there's your wise reflection. These are examples of wise reflection. You have a thought in your mind of some sensual desire or sexual desire, doesn't matter what it is. And you can see that it's obsessive. And if you hang on in there, it's just going to do you harm. And it's reflecting on the harm that it could possibly do to you that makes you want to let go of it. So then it'll subside. You're bringing up the opposite.

In the same way, if you have a sensual thought which is going to hurt somebody else, like feeding their addictions, then you have to see what a horrible thing that is, and the desire will subside. And when we do something that harms both myself and somebody else, then obviously that also helps us to let go of these thoughts.

"It obstructs wisdom." So remember, wisdom here is not an intellectual thing. It's a way of being. So it obstructs the wisdom, which is to live in harmony, to live with goodwill, to live with non-greed. "Causes difficulties and obviously leads away from *Nibbāna*."

So here, whenever the thought of sensual desire arose in me, I abandoned it, removed it and did away with it. The same thing he said of course of all those thoughts around ill will and the thoughts around cruelty: I abandoned it, removed it, did away with it.

Then he says — there's a little passage here — "Whatever a person frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks or ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, he has abandoned the thought of renunciation to cultivate the thought of sensual desire. And then his mind inclines to thoughts of sensual desire."

This may seem a little obvious to us now, but in those days, I would have thought this is quite a revolutionary way of thinking about our psychology. We know that when we keep thinking about the same thing, it becomes obsessive. It becomes a place where the mind seeks pleasure, seeks happiness. And then, of course, it is then expressed in the way we speak and what we do. And in so doing, of course, you're renouncing the path of renunciation.

Always remember, when we talk about the path of renunciation, it's not the same as self-mortification. We're not blaming the body for its appetite. What we're trying to let go of is our obsessiveness around food, obsessiveness around sex, and so on and so forth. And that obsessiveness is what we're renouncing. We're not indulging it.

How do we indulge these things? Through our thinking, through imagination. And it excites the heart. Remember, all these desires begin in the heart, the heart base. And that's what we have to recognize here. What the Buddha is pushing away, abandoning, annihilating, is thoughts. He's not suggesting here that you should also try to annihilate a feeling, your emotional, your heart state. Far from it. We know from the discourse on how to establish right mindfulness that he wants us to actually go in there to feel those feelings, feel feelings in feelings.

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