

A summary of Dhamma Practice

The ability to tolerate painful feeling opens up a new dimension to experience. If we can develop this power, our minds are no longer obsessed with avoiding these feelings. In this way we let go of our desires for the sake of following moral precepts or a discipline, this is virtue (*sīla*). We let go of our desires in order to follow the breath instead, this is meditation. We practice contemplating the suffering of mind and body to let go of desire once and for all, this is wisdom.

It is only if we cannot see anything other than conditioned reality that the Buddha's teachings on suffering can seem a negation of everything. Ultimately, all our suffering arises from such a limited view. Dhamma offers a different view of what is real and possible; by merely accepting this potential we will be happier, if we can realize it much happier still. The end of suffering is to see things completely the way they are, and to completely accept that truth.

The Mind

As we start to look inside we realize that what remains when we close our eyes to meditate are precisely those things that we get attached to when they are open. If we can avoid blindly reacting to such emotions it is good, but not to respond to emotion at all is not good. If we look for a resolution to a painful memory simply by watching together with an attempt to avoid adding new negative karma to it, then we will not have lastingly gotten over, even if it might seem so at that time. Every time the emotions connected to that memory arise the pain will keep arising, until we add something positive or change our view of what happened. The best way to operate is to allow things to come up on their own, to come to us if possible and then, when they have arisen, look for a wholesome and skilful response.

Taking it further, the practice is aimed not merely at resolving specifics or making peace with ourselves, but to really get to the heart of things. When we can do this – and the calmer and emptier heart acts like a mirror to the mind – we see that emotions arise based on perceptions. And we have different sets of emotions based on different perceptions that we have had over time, often related to different intentions or roles. And these emotions give rise to different personae. This is natural, it is only if we have fixed ideas about our feelings that we become confused and experience inner conflict.

This 'fixing' is like touching ourselves with our minds, and it reinforces and attaches us to emotions, making them appear more real, just like touching the physical world makes it real in our minds. But if we don't touch we can instead re-examine the validity of our perceptions. Yet we also have to recognize and tackle what it is that makes us want to 'touch ourselves'. How does the craving for and attachment to such feeling arise?

The Body

We have to trust the teaching that the source of attachment – i.e. feeling – is different from the source of detachment – the clear seeing of the body. This fact makes the deepest practice indirect; we undermine our attachment to the body in order to uproot our attachment to feeling. While we are walking this path we might discover the pleasant feeling of space or of letting go whereby we overcome the need for the

pleasant feelings of holding on. This is our stepping stone to letting go of feeling altogether.

Then the only way to prevent the needs of the body or mind to pull us out of these pleasant spaces in our minds and hearts is to draw those spaces right into the body. Relaxing the body is the first step; being relaxed about the body is the second. Yet the ultimate purpose here is to completely let go of the body, at the right time, in the right and peaceful way, for the right reason. This will take us to the Deathless.

If we see that the mind in its worldly conditions is dependent on the body, but in essence is not the body; then we can see the possibility of a mind that is not dependent on a particular body but just any body – hence the possibility of rebirth. We can let go moment by moment and of one body for another.

And if this mind essence or spirit becomes stable we see the possibility for it to detach completely from all bodies – or from physicality in itself. We will also see that while we live out our lives the detached position is the mind contained within the body, neither in the world nor away from it, and that such detachment is gained by seeing suffering with compassion. **Seeing suffering the mind lets go, but having compassion it does not withdraw.**

I offer this for your reflection.

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