

Stuck-in-the-head Buddhism

To arrive at the Dhamma you have to be interested in examining the real world, not merely in engaging in abstract theory or living in a world of ideas. The mode of Dhamma is essentially down to earth and reaching to the sky, but never lost in the clouds. Theoretical discussion of Dhamma is only valid where it relates to experience. If we start to lose experience and talk only about ideas then we are lost in proliferation. Actually, in terms of Dhamma, all ideas emerge out of mindfulness, a clear experience and description of experience in the present moment. The confusion between ideas and experience, or concept and reality, can run very deep. Because of this we need to be continually referencing reality rather than immediately trying to generalise and getting drawn into theory. One of the big pitfalls is to spin off into intellectual debate where our first thought is always “but what about if...” It is natural enough to try to generalise but this tends to be full of pitfalls and what we do not realise is that it is not necessary. It is through understanding a single experience fully that we come to understand all other experience, or the nature of experience in itself, in other words.

Always if we get into ideas we can end up just playing around with them. This is similar to the habit of some meditators to just be playing around with techniques – a technique of meditation can also be a way of stepping away from the reality of our experience rather than into it.

Or we can just choose the ideas, perceptions and methods that we like whether they have any basis in reality at all. It can just become “what are you into then?” or “what do you connect with?” rather than what is right or wrong, true or untrue. The former is easier, more friendly and comfortable, after all. If we go very far, we can even play around to the point where we are not seeing that some techniques, like hyperventilation or the use of drugs, are very dangerous.

It is the challenge of the Dhamma warrior to face the difficult things in life – if we run away to our rooms or into our heads we will never see the Dhamma. If we are going to do the real thing and strive for samādhi we need to stop the proliferation process. If we are going to do the real thing and face our mortality we need to be standing on very solid ground; yet perhaps this tendency to spin off is the way that we are running away from this very aspect of reality into the seemingly permanent and ineffable mental realm, the realm that is our greatest source of delusion.

Our comfortable existence is also to blame. To get past the ideas and the techniques we might have to go and work in a hospital or climb a mountain or something. Or live somewhere where we cannot control our environment through our ideas, preferably somewhere where we cannot control it at all.

I offer this for your reflection.

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