

Observing the problems in our lives

Ajahn Jagaro

As lay people living an ordinary lay life with all the commitments, involvements and responsibilities that are normally involved in lay living, it's difficult to devote much time to really develop meditation. So I think for many Western people Buddhism seems to create a bit of a dilemma because of the way Buddhism is taught in the West. You come here and the teachings that we give are quite high aspects of Buddhist teaching, quite refined aspects, pointing always to meditation, pointing always to the development of awareness in order for insight, a deeper understanding, to arise. A penetration into the way things really are rather than the way they appear to be. I think for many Westerners it's very difficult to apply that teaching within the normal daily life they're living. Many Westerners who are now becoming interested in Buddhism and trying to practise the teachings of the Buddha, trying to really follow them, feel somehow a bit of conflict there.

It's difficult to live your ordinary daily life with its ordinary responsibilities, commitments, social involvements, and still want to develop this degree of refinement of the Buddhist path. And it's a dilemma because it's difficult to do. If one's life is very much involved with socialising, very much involved with family, very much involved with commitments, and responsibilities, then of course one has to compromise one's time, one's energy, one's interests. You can't devote that much time to the practise of making yourself calm and clearing the mind, and developing a refined sort of introspection. And so that teaching which is so refined sometimes seems a bit out of a reach for you.

The Buddha's teaching is still very applicable, very useful, very relevant even if one can't meditate every day. Even if one can't spend hours meditating, one can still appreciate the Buddha's teachings and apply a lot of that teaching. A lot of the teaching is to do with ordinary daily living, knowing how to make the best use of this life as an ordinary person. Being born as a human being in Buddhism is considered a great blessing and privilege because human beings can free themselves from mechanical, habitual existence patterns. A human being can reflect on the results of living and can choose which direction to go. But one must make that choice, one must take that opportunity to make the choice. That is one must take an interest in one's life, reflecting on it.

So many people want to escape from themselves and they do all sorts of things to escape from themselves because it's difficult and there are problems. So when I said that human beings have the opportunity to reflect on their lives, this is what I mean. Observing our lives. *Observing the problems in our lives.*

The Buddha reflected on life, he reflected on his own life, he reflected on other people's lives. He observed and he came to the conclusion that the source of the problem is the ego. The ego gets in the way. Reflect on this. What is the ego? It's a sense of *me*. A separation, me separate from you, and when I'm separate I have my own interest. Desire and aversion only arise from ego, nothing else. ***Where there's no ego, there's no desire, no aversion.*** Desire for what? What do we desire? That which gratifies and flatters the ego. We like that, we want that, it makes the ego feel good. I see somebody, they say I'm wonderful, so I want to get close to them. What is aversion? That which challenges the ego, threatens the ego, insults the ego, humiliates the ego. The ego doesn't like that so it reacts with aversion and anger.

When there is this ego present there are bound to be problems arising in relationships. When I say relationships I don't mean just relationships between you and another person, I mean in every experience in life. Every experience that you're involved in is a relationship. And where there is ego, there will be problems. That's the situation, that's why life is not ideal. The Buddha had no ego. The Buddha was at peace and he is a

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blessing to the world, a blessing to all beings; that's the result of having no ego.

But of course, we have an ego. You can hear the Buddha's teaching, 'Everything is not self,' There is no self. But you feel you have a self. So there's an ego. What do we do with it? This is what the Buddha taught when he spoke about skilful ways of living. Learning to live within this limitation. Learning to live with an ego. Learning to work with this ego. How can one live with an ego and still create more happiness than misery? What do we do? The *Dhamma* the Buddha taught is something which he said is self-evident. Anyone who observes can see it. The Buddha said that if there is a problem, there's a cause. If you get rid of the cause, the problem is also removed. What is the problem? It is the problem of suffering and of unhappiness of unsatisfactoriness. The cause of it is the ego. Can you get rid of it? Not yet. So what do you do in the meantime. There are a few qualities which are absolutely essential and yet they are very much lacking in life. That's why there are so many problems today.

The first quality is called '*sacca*' in *Pali*. *Sacca* is like honesty, truthfulness. It's an openness, frankness, being able to share. Openness doesn't mean just giving out. Openness means that you can also receive, it's an exchange. Bring this openness into your relationships, all relationships.

Just think of meditation, you've really got to be honest with yourself, frank with yourself. Why are you meditating? Because meditation is an opening up, you are sitting there listening to yourself, not trying to distract yourself. So you need this quality of inner honesty, of being able to look at yourself and seeing what's there.

The second quality which I've observed to be lacking is patience (*khanti*). Patience means 'space', giving a lot of 'space', allowing failings, allowing shortcomings, allowing imperfections, allowing differences. Allowing and giving room is to be patient, it's being kind. You can allow failings within yourself. Allowing, giving space, being patient enough to allow people to be different, to have failings, to have good and bad sides is very important.

In meditation you must be patient, you must allow the mind space, give it room. Give the mind time to settle down, to calm down. Concentration is not a forced thing, concentration is an agreement, the mind agrees to calm down, agrees to come to rest here. You can't force it. Brute force is not necessary, you have to give it this space.

In a relationship give yourselves space. Allow differences. Allow imperfections. This giving of space requires a lot of humility. To accept failings in yourself, to accept failings in others requires humility, doesn't it? The ego can't tolerate failure, so you've got to be very humble to accept the nature of the body, to accept that this body is imperfect. To accept the failings and limitations of your own mind.

So if you can just begin to implement some of these qualities, you will see how many problems would very, very quickly be resolved in our lives. Problems in our meditation, problems in our relationships. We would be able to cope with life a lot better. We would be at peace with life for a greater portion of the day.

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