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Earnestness

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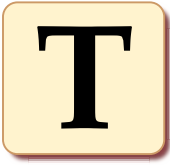
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Earnestness

*“Handa dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo:
Vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetthā ti.*

“Verily, I say unto you now O monks:
All things are transient, work out your
deliverance with earnestness!”



These were the last words of the Buddha: for us, a reminder not to give up the struggle against the fetters of greed, hate and ignorance (binding us to existence), in order to escape the misery of Saṃsāra.

A great satisfaction is given us by the master’s solemn assurance that we do possess the power to overcome all evil things in us and to develop all good things. Just as the overcoming of evil, so also the begetting of good things in us, will bring us joy and happiness.

Therefore the Buddha said: The evil and unwholesome things you should abandon, and arouse in you wholesome. If this were impossible, the Buddha never would have advised us of putting forth all our energy and effort, and never would have said: “I am a teacher of endeavour, of energy.”

Training must be done, will must be exercised, exertion must be made; there must be no turning back, there must be ardour, there must be perseverance, there must be mindfulness, there must be right understanding, there must be earnestness.

Whenever anyone accuses the Buddha of being a denier, a suppressor, a scorner, having no regard, etc., he should be answered thus: "Truly, regardless is the Buddha because all regard to visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily impressions and mental objects is utterly abolished in the Blessed One.

"Without love is the Buddha, because all love for visual objects, sounds, smells, bodily impressions and mental objects is utterly destroyed in him.

"Inactivity teaches the Buddha, because he teaches not to be active in doing evil by thoughts, words and deeds.

"Annihilation teaches the Buddha, the annihilation of greed, anger and delusion. A scorner is the Buddha because he scorns, all bad actions in thoughts, words and deeds. A denier is the Buddha because he denies all greed, hate and ignorance and all the other unwholesome things.

"A suppressor is the Buddha because he teaches us to suppress all evil and unwholesome things, and to suppress all bad action, in thoughts, words and deeds.

And one who has completely suppressed all these things is called a suppressor. An outcast is Buddha because has been cast out from saṃsāra and excluded from further rebirth.” (AN 8:11)

“Earnestness leads to the Deathless,
Heedlessness is the road to death;
The earnest men will never die,
The heedless seem already dead.” (Dhp 21)

What many monks and laymen have attained—why should I not attain this? I am healthy, full of faith, am not a hypocrite, not a pretender or boaster, but I have willpower and understand that all sense objects are transient, subject to pain and suffering, an ulcer, a thorn, a misery, a burden, an enemy, a disturbance, empty and void of an ego. Why should I not hope for deliverance and Nibbāna?”

In the Mahāvachchagotta Sutta, the Blessed One said that not only monks and nuns attained Nibbāna, but that even many laymen and laywomen, remaining in the world and living a chaste life free from fetters and hindrances of mind, had attained Anāgāmihip—i.e.—the third state of the “Non-returner”, so called as he after death never will again return to this world.

Just now, in this present materialistic age, such words of the Buddha should have a stimulating and

encouraging effect, because many people are labouring under the delusion that in this modern time of aeroplanes and auto cars, the present generation, despite their best intentions, could not find time and leisure to cultivate higher mental faculties.

Over and over again the Buddha assures: 'You can rouse your will, you can act, you can change your character by certain lines of efforts and attain deliverance!'

He who wills success, is half way to it. Where there is a will, there is a way! The will is the root of all things, not only of vice and suffering, but also of virtue.

Negation of the will for demeritorious action is taught by the Blessed One.

"Chanden'eva chandaṃ pajahati: through will willing can be conquered." Having attained holiness through will, the will for holiness has been stilled.

In the Iddhipāda-Saṃyutta (SN 51) the brahmin Unnabha asks the Venerable Ānanda:

"What is the purpose of the holy life as explained by the ascetic Gotama?"

"To give up one's will, therefore one practises the holy life under the Exalted One."

“Is there a way, a path, to give up one’s will?”

“There is, Brāhmana, a way, a path, to give up one’s will.”

“What is now, Venerable Ānanda, the way, the path, to give up this, will?”

“Herein a monk develops the four roads to power: concentration and effort of will, of energy, of mind and of investigation. This, Brāhmaṇa, is the way, the path, to give up one’s will.”

“This being so, Venerable Ānanda, there will be only an endlessness: but no end of the actions of willing. That through will, the will may be dissolved—such a thing is not possible.”

“So I shall put you a question, Brāhmaṇa and you may answer it as you please?”

“What do you think, Brāhmaṇa, did not arise in you first the will to go to the monastery, did the will then not come to an end?”

“Yes, O Lord.”

“It is just the same with the monk who, holy, freed from greed, perfect, who has

accomplished his task, thrown off the burden, attained deliverance through wisdom. Whatever such a one formerly possessed of will, energy, mind investigation with regard to the attainment holiness, having become holy—such energy, such mind and such investigation has ceased.

“What you think now, Brāhmaṇa, if so is there an end or endlessness of willing?”

“Certainly, Venerable Ānanda, if it is so, then there is an end of willing and no endlessness.” “The will (*cetanā*),” says the Buddha, “I declare as the (karma): for through the will one performs actions in thoughts, words and bodily deed.” The will is the action, and nobody can pull back the decision one has taken. Only he who earnestly strives for developing higher mental faculties can accomplish what the multitude thinks impossible.

“You will become truth, if you love the truth. You will become earthly, if you love the earthly.” The faith of every man comes out of his innermost: what he loves he is, and what he is he loves, and he believes it too and will be united with it; because every thought attracts its thought-object.

He who does his work as in duty bound, will attain Nibbāna by following the Holy Eightfold Path, consisting in Right Understanding, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Attentiveness and Right Concentration, be it in this life, be it in the next life, be it in any other future life.

Therein take your refuge, therein see your sovereign remedy, and with all your heart strive for it; then will peace develop into everlasting bliss.

To know the whole truth, not merely by words, but to know it from actual inner experience, this is the greatest need of life.

“To know is to do”: without carrying out in practice, there is no true knowledge in mind. Take it and make it the guide of your life! But the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

A true Buddhist lay devotee always strives for wisdom, trying to know the world in its outer and inner manifestation, to penetrate to the conditional arising of all mental and physical phenomena. He will reach that high and lofty realm of freedom; because of his self-control he will get to know the wholesome and unwholesome influxes of his mind.

Therefore, he is always alert and mindful, gets his livelihood by a right way of living, abstains from

alcohol, narcotics and stimulants, refrains from food after noon at least once a month, leads a retired life; he avoids harsh language and abstains from quarrelling, suppresses all demeritorious things arising in his mind, remains always even-tempered when despised, passes no judgment about others as he knows that by doing so he will harm himself.

In short, he is always clearly aware of all his actions in thoughts, words and deeds, utters always the right word, at the right time, on the right spot.

Thus he lives for his own welfare, for the welfare of the whole world. In spite of all ignorance, of all greed, anger and delusion, mankind is connected by an invisible tie, a tie of goodwill, loving kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy, a tie which binds us together as the same kind of beings of nature. It is not an empty dream but a truth. The destination of mankind is to attain to highest wisdom, Enlightenment and Nibbāna, and that every one can reach this goal if he fulfils the necessary conditions.

Whether one lives the life of a householder, or whether one becomes a monk, when there is wrong living it is impossible to attain deliverance of mind; but if the mode of life is according to the Holy Eightfold Path, one is sure to attain the goal of holiness, Nibbāna.

In gradual progress the holy path leads man along, from the mundane to the supermundane; such a being, following the holy path, becomes a superman compared with the worldling; but its highest perfection is reached by the Enlightened One.

To work for enlightenment and deliverance of mind is everywhere possible for one who has heard the teachings of the Buddha and puts them into practice.

At what epoch, in which era, is it possible to attain enlightenment and deliverance of mind? It is not limited to any epoch or era. As long as there are men willing to develop the Holy Eightfold Path, and are absorbed in meditation on the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, delighted in the growth of moral and mental faculties, for so long the attainment of the highest goal of final emancipation will be possible.

Hence the truth proclaimed by the Blessed One depends on no special period of time. It is the visible truth leading to Nibbāna, but it can be penetrated and realised only by a wise man, through his own experience.

“Enraptured with lust, enraged with anger, blinded by delusion, with mind ensnared, man aims at his own ruin, at the other’s ruin, at the ruin of both, and he experiences mental pain and grief.” But as soon as lust, anger and delusion are given up, then all mental

pain, grief and sufferings are destroyed and one has reached “the Everlasting”. Such is the teaching of the Holy One, the timeless and visible truth leading to Nibbāna, which is intelligible only to a wise man through his own experience.

So long as there are monks who are filled with living faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and live together in harmony and feel it their duty to follow the Holy Eightfold Path, and live untiring in developing meritorious actions, and detest slothfulness, for so long will the Dhamma, the universal law, continue.

Thus it rests with us to decide whether the Dhamma should continue for the good of many or whether the demon in human shape should gain power.

The “will” manifested in our good and bad actions decides about our future and our whole destiny. Only he who understands the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, furnishes the conditions for a long duration of the Dhamma; whilst those with a wrong understanding will ruin the Dhamma in no time.

The truth has one great obstacle to face—delusion, which constantly opposes it. Not the common sceptic is the greatest adversary of the Dhamma, but the man with great enthusiasm and little knowledge; the clever hair-splitter who adheres to his system as the one and

only refuge, the pious man who follows blindly tradition and faith, who is afraid to give any opinion of his own but only what he has learnt in school, and the fanatic with his narrow mind—all those are the real enemies of truth.

It seems nearly impossible to carry the torch of truth through the crowd without scorching it. Now, what may be the cause that there are only so few people in our present time that attains deliverance of mind, though the path to liberation is clearly shown?

The cause is that the mass of the people are not walking on the Holy Eightfold Path, and that they do not like to exercise control over their minds. They will perhaps say:

“Well, what can the world bestow on me? “
Thou shouldst renounce, renounce”
That’s the constant song that ever in our ears
resounds.
And all our life we hear that irksome song!”

“Why, truth, didst thou come to worry us before our time and bring so much affliction?” Thus the ignorant talk without rhyme or reason. They feel bored, and at that time they shun to delve into their own minds. Often it is also politics that swallows up all desire for developing higher faculties of the mind which would

enable man to perceive clearly and distinctly the world in which he lives in its true light.

The noble disciple of the Buddha, however, considers this world as a labyrinth of errors, as a dreadful desert, as a morass of infamy, as a dwelling place of wild beasts, as a land of ill-luck, as a source of sorrow, as an ocean of misery, as a false joy, as an endless suffering, as greed, anger and delusion beyond measure, as thirst never stilled, as a skeleton at the feast, as a laugh on the wrong side of the mouth, as a stink in the nostrils, as a delicious drink mixed with poison, as a place too burning hot for staying on, as a mirage, as a den of vice, as a constant disharmony, as a pitiless war, as the breath of death, as a hell for the living, as an endless funeral, as a pompous illusion, as an arrogant misery, as a deplorable luck, as an apothecary's shop full of bitter though gilded pills.

For that reason, the noble disciple has no longer the desire to build up this world but to get rid of it. He knows that no thing in it is worth to be attached to. All bodily forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness he regards as transient, subject to pain and suffering and void of an ego. Having thus attained insight into these five groups of existence, the noble disciple will attain deliverance of mind in due course and will reach happiness supreme.

Hence, how can one say that the following of the Holy Eightfold Path be equal to self-torment and pessimism, while it is the unfolding of inner serenity accompanied by unhemmed moral courage—the only worthy endeavour in life. This is the solace the Buddha gives in which our heart always delights and which guides us from worldly illusions into the realm of truth. From the restless struggle for existence to everlasting peace.

It is a delusive idea to regard this world as the best that is imaginable; behind the laughing mask of nature other things hide than mere mirth and jubilation. Take away the mask and you will find such things as cannibalism, child murder, sanctioned killing in many forms, slavery and bondage, theft and robbery, oppressing and torturing of old and helpless people and prisoners, disregard for the life of others. Massacre and attack from enemies shedding blood like water, taking delight in ferocious deeds, shamelessness and sexual perversion of every sort; and there is egotism without limits. Thus the silent thinker beholds the world and life which multitudes welcome and love so dearly.

“Don’t trouble me with your Mother Nature” told Prof. Naegeli to a student who in his thesis bestowed great praise upon nature.

He said: "If Mother Nature had been as kind-hearted as the common run of people say, she would never allow the cat playing with the mice so cruelly, and the red backed shrike piercing the insect in such a horrid and dreadful way. Who else did put such horrid instincts into these animals but your glorified mother nature?"

"She certainly disposes over wonderful instruments and arrangements by which she is of great use to us today, but she will destroy us tomorrow.

"Don't try to find compassion in nature!"

Amongst men you may find compassion. We must compel nature to hand over to us her instruments to our interest."

For evaluating life correctly it is necessary to plunge into a deep contemplation of all that is alive and astir on this earth. There the "Ecce vita" will, as a plastic picture, reveal to our mind's eye that Gorgon's head whose looks turn the beholder to stone.

Generally, most people dislike to see the true facts of life. They like to lull themselves in security by sweet dreams and imaginations, taking the shadow for the substance; but whenever they see for one moment things in their true nature, they turn away in a shudder and say: 'My dear Sir, don't think about those things so deeply.'

Such people succeed in deceiving themselves more thoroughly by their false pretences, subterfuges and evasions, than often the philosopher does by speculating on 'self' or 'soul'.

In the air, as on earth and in water, all living beings are engaged in a permanent struggle for existence, in the unending battle of life. *Aññamaññakhādikā ettha vattati* "Devouring each other is the practice here," says the Buddha.

Due to greed, anger and delusion, man is always at war with his neighbour, trying through tricks, dodges and devices, to live at the expense of others; like Cain, to kill his brother, rob him or make him his slave. And the more man becomes civilised, the more dreadful is the struggle for existence—sounds of merciless savagery, anguished shrieks of mortal fear and horrible yells of death cry to heaven for vengeance.

With shuddering, we behold the gruesome scenes of crime, of war and plague, with their havoc, devastation and misery. With our mind's eyes we can read in the human heart the torturing thoughts of guilt, of repentance and accusation, "Oh, have pity, your gloomy ghosts of guilt." But they have not. Threateningly they appear before the guilty conscience: pictures of judgment run through the mind that is in mortal fear.

Numberless like the stars in the sky, man's prayers rise to heaven, but there is no response.

“They never will be heard in heaven
If heaven does not enter us.
And only there the prayers ripen,
Where love and mercy fill our heart;
There will the ever rising sorrows calm down,
there in that heart alone,
That, free from fear and unrest, firmly
Is fixed on Buddha's Holy Law.”

Through steadily following the Holy Eightfold Path, and by training the heart in noble effort and patience, it is possible even for the worst evil-doer to bring gradually the liberation of his heart to highest perfection and so partake of happiness sublime.

Thus one can rightly say that the teaching of the Buddha bestows the highest happiness, even in this present life. It fulfils all our higher aspirations and makes the sun of righteousness shine in our heart. It satisfies all that can rightly be expected from a life that is impermanent, and gives us a deep sense of imperturbable calm. It does not allow us to fall into error and guilt again and again, and cleanses us gradually from all greed, anger and delusion. It frees us for ever from all evil and suffering by bestowing the incomparable ultimate security of Nibbāna.

Even our good acts and our sacrifices for the welfare of others, be they ever so great and noble, even they are transient, and will not protect us for ever against the torments of suffering. But the four Noble Truths proclaimed by the Buddha are immutable, undestructible and everlasting.

And that generation is the happiest where these four holy truths are well established and well understood. For that reason, one should not miss such rare opportunity which our present age still affords, but rouse one's will to realise these truths and reach enlightenment.

That is why the Buddha said at the time of His death: "All things are impermanent, work out your deliverance with earnestness!"

*"Adhigataṃ idaṃ bahūhi amataṃ,
Ajjāpi ca labhanīyaṃ idaṃ,
Yo yoniso payuñjati
Na ca sakā aghaṭamānena."*

"Attained has been this deathlessness by many,
And still today this state can be obtained by him
who strives in earnestness,
But none will reach it without effort." (Therīgāthā
513)

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