Bodhi Leaf Publication No. 154

The Good, The Beautiful, and The True

Bhikkhu Bodhi

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The Good, The Beautiful, and The True

By

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Dedicated to the memory of the late
Godwin Samararatne,
whose life embodied the quest for
Goodness, Beauty, and Truth

Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

Bodhi Leaves No. 154

First published: 2001

Digital Transcription Source: BPS and Access to Insight Transcription Project

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The Quest for Happiness

All human beings, by their very nature, seek to be free from suffering and to find happiness. This aim, however, proves so elusive because our desire for happiness does not automatically entail knowledge of how to find it. If the knowledge of how to attain happiness automatically came along with the desire to be happy, there would be no need for a Buddha to arise in the world. We would all be able to achieve perfect happiness entirely on our own. We need the guidance of a Buddha because, though we naturally wish to avoid suffering and to attain happiness, we have no clear conception of the path that can bring this desire to fulfilment.

The root of our problem is thus one of knowledge, of clear comprehension. Despite our confidence in our

own powers of understanding, our minds are in reality not reliable instruments of knowledge, but are subject to innate distortions that prevent us from gaining the type of knowledge we require. These distortions prevent us from understanding what we must avoid to overcome suffering, and what we must undertake to find true happiness and peace.

This lack of clear understanding is what the Buddhist texts call *avijjā*, ignorance or delusion. On account of ignorance we become victims of craving, of obsessive desire, and thus habitually engage in types of behaviour that are superficially pleasant but eventually bring discontent and suffering. There are other types of behaviour that seem to us difficult, painful, and challenging. These courses of action, we sense, might lead to stable happiness, but because they clash with our natural inclinations, because they involve effort, struggle, and inner change, we do not feel attracted to them. In short, we adhere to familiar ways of behaviour that bring immediate pleasure even when they are ultimately self-destructive; and we shun new, wholesome courses of behaviour even though, if we understood them properly, we would see that they ultimately lead to our benefit.

Many people identify happiness with the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. They assume that happiness comes from indulging the desire for delightful sights,

sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations. Thus they devote their energy to acquiring the means to obtain these objects of pleasure. Others are concerned not so much with the sensual pleasures that wealth can buy as with the wealth itself. For such people, wealth becomes a good in its own right. They evaluate themselves and others by the scale of their salaries, bank accounts and holdings. They invest their time seeking to earn more, to acquire possessions, to increase their wealth. Seldom do they pause long enough to enjoy the pleasures their wealth might make available to them.

Other people devote their effort to the pursuit of power. They want to achieve high status so they can exercise control over others. They identify the attainment of happiness with high status and the exercise of political and social power. Still others are concerned less with wealth and power than with personal security. They do not attempt to climb the ladder of social status, but are content to settle for a lower rung: a secure and comfortable middle-class existence in which they conform to the general consensus of what a respectable life should consist in. They may have a nice house in the suburbs, a nice wife or husband, nice children attending a nice school. Everything in their lives seems as pretty as in a picture book, except that one thing is missing: a deep source

of meaning that gives true nobility and value to their existence.

If we deeply examine the lives of people engaged in the pursuit of worldly goals, whether it be sensual pleasures, possessions, wealth, power, or security, we would find that in their heart of hearts they enjoy very little real happiness and contentment. Happiness eludes them because they assume that happiness consists in submitting to the dictates of craving. They fail to understand that craving in itself is insatiable. Thus, as soon as they achieve one object of desire, rather than finding contentment, they become obsessed by a new desire. This desire drives them on to the pursuit of new pleasures, more wealth, or higher positions of power. Thus the pursuit of worldly achievements moves in a vicious cycle, desire leading to gratification and gratification to new desire.

To convince ourselves that this is true, we need only consider the lives of those belonging to the so-called privileged élite. Such people seem to have everything one might desire: command of great wealth, high position, status, all the luxuries we might dream of. Yet though such people might be the envy of everyone else's eyes, we often find that within their hearts they experience no real serenity. If you visit their homes, you see a large house with many rooms, lovely furniture, and beautiful decorations. They may have

servants and cooks, eat delicious food, and enjoy all the privileges of high status. But if you go into the bathroom and look into the medicine cabinet, you might find sedatives, anti-depressants, sleeping tablets, and stimulants: all sorts of psychotropic drugs to help them get through the stress and strain of their daily lives.

These reflections should convince us that real happiness is determined not by our material possessions and worldly success, but by our inner qualities of mind and heart: not by what *we have*, but by what *we are*. True happiness comes from a peaceful mind and does not depend primarily on our material conditions. Of course, to live happily we need some degree of material security. People oppressed by hunger, disease and poverty cannot easily find happiness. Material security, however, is only a foundation, a starting point, for the development of our inner qualities. It is the development of these inner qualities, the development of the mind, that brings true happiness and peace.

The Buddha's teaching, in its classical formulation, speaks of the entire round of existence, *saṃsāra*, as *dukkha* or suffering. The teaching tells us that ultimate happiness is to be found in release from the 'wheel': by realising Nibbāna, the ultimate truth, which brings freedom from the round of rebirth. However, the

Buddha also speaks about types of happiness that can be experienced right here and now in this present life. Thus I wish to examine what true happiness might mean according to the Dhamma without bringing in the classical framework of *kamma*, rebirth, and Nibbāna as liberation from the round of rebirth.

I don't intend to say that we should put these teachings aside, for they are very essential to obtain a deep and comprehensive view of the Dhamma. The entire path to deliverance, as formulated by the Buddha, rests upon this philosophical framework, and to try to remove it or rationalise it is to wind up with an eviscerated version of the teaching. However, the Buddha himself says that one should examine the Dhamma for oneself in terms of one's own experience. Thus I want to begin with what is visible right before our eyes, what we can personally see for ourselves about the meaning of happiness and inner peace. By taking the visible types of happiness as the basis of our inquiry, we can gain confidence and trust in those aspects of the Dhamma that presently lie outside our range of vision.

In what follows, I will explore the concept of happiness, analyse it into its constituents, and inquire what must be done to achieve it. I will do this by taking three concepts that constitute the ultimate good according to the Western philosophical tradition, and

show how they can be achieved through the Buddha's teaching. These three concepts are Goodness, Truth, and Beauty, but I will examine them in a somewhat different sequence: Goodness, Beauty, and Truth.

Each of these concepts exercises dominion over a distinct sphere of human values: ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge. Goodness is the pinnacle of the ethical sphere. It is at once the underlying ground of right action, a quality that suffuses right action, and the inner state to which right action leads. Value in the ethical sphere is determined by the exercise of practical reason. To decide how we should act in the concrete situations we face in everyday life, we resort to a particular type of reflection as a regulative principle of our behaviour. In other words, to actualize Goodness, we must respond to situations that demand a response in ways governed by ethical considerations.

Beauty is the highest value in the aesthetic sphere. The word 'aesthetics' usually suggests the appreciation of works of art, but I am using this word in a somewhat wider sense to refer to the whole range of experience in which Beauty is the dominant element. Art is considered the domain of aesthetics because great works of art arouse in us a sense of the sublime, a perception of transcendent beauty. But we can also gain a perception of the Beautiful by looking

at breathtaking landscapes, by admiring great personalities, and by developing our minds towards exalted states of consciousness. For most people, the contemplation of art lifts their minds to crescendos of feeling unknown in normal life, and thus for most of us art is the primary means to awaken an experience of wonder and grandeur. But the encounter with the Beautiful can also be induced more intensely, and with greater potentials for spiritual achievement, by the direct transformation of consciousness in its affective and aesthetic capacities.

Truth is the ultimate object of our quest for knowledge. The whole purpose of the scientific enterprise is to uncover the truth about the world. Though scientific discoveries have practical applications, science is not entirely hostage to technology. Theoretical knowledge is widely regarded as a good in itself. 'Pure science', the quest for a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the world, stirs our enthusiasm and drives much scientific research even when technological applications are unlikely. Yet the knowledge obtained by the scientific method always strikes us as terribly contingent. It is inseparably bound up with spheres that do not exhibit any trace of completeness; it is subject to constant correction and extension; it always seems to be scratching the surface of things. Our thirst for

knowledge can only be satisfied by a sphere of Truth that confers upon us perfect knowledge, a knowing which penetrates to the profoundest depths of reality.

In sum, our quest for true happiness must combine three qualities: commitment to ethical Goodness, or the implementation of moral values in our active life; the contemplation of Beauty, the experience of elevated feelings that confer a sense of the sublime; and the realisation of Truth, a knowledge that gives satisfaction and completeness to our intellectual life.

The Good

According to the Buddha's teaching, the necessary condition for any degree of true happiness is Goodness, that is, moral rectitude or virtue (*sīla*). Such Goodness is to be realised by ethical behaviour. In order to be truly happy, to experience true happiness in our lives, we must lead an ethically virtuous life. This means that we must adopt standards of behaviour by which we give consideration to the well-being of others in our bodily actions and speech. The moral life is a life in which we rise above the demands of self-interest and give heed to the interests of others

as determinants of action.

Though in the Buddhist texts, morality is usually summed up in various codes of precepts, according to the Buddha the foundation for morality does not lie in any specific set of rules or precepts. It lies, rather, in a principle that we can apply in our relations with other living beings, especially with other human beings. This principle is the guideline of using oneself as the criterion for deciding how to act in relation to other people. When we have to relate to other people in particular situations, we have to step out of our own skin and place ourselves in the position of the other. If I feel driven to behave in a certain way towards another person, I must first consider how I would like it if somebody else were to behave towards me in such a way. This principle means, in effect, that we have to show respect and consideration towards other people, and not act merely on the spur of impulsive self-interest.

From this fundamental principle the Buddha derives the basic moral precepts of his teaching. Thus the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*) are arrived at by applying the guideline of using one's self as a criterion to the most common situations amenable to an ethical point of view. By considering one's own feelings, we derive the precepts not to kill, not to misappropriate the belongings of others, not to engage in sexual

misconduct, and not to speak falsely. To these four, the Buddha adds the fifth precept, to abstain from intoxicants, thus completing the Five Precepts. This precept is added, not because the use of intoxicants is directly harmful to others, but because one who indulges in intoxicants weakens the restraint imposed by conscience and thus becomes inclined to break the other precepts.

Practising morality by observing the Five Precepts leads to a type of happiness that the Buddha calls the happiness of blamelessness (*anavajjasukha*). When people engage in selfish, unethical behaviour, they may secure their own advantage in ways that make them appear to be successful, happy, and fulfilled, and we might even envy them for this. But when one acts against the basic principles of morality, deep within the mind one generates an underlying sense of discomfort—a recognition, dim or clear, that one has caused harm and suffering to others. This recognition brings along a gnawing sense of distress, which prevents us from finding happiness no matter how successful we might appear outwardly.

To see that this is so, imagine a big-time gangster who has earned vast wealth as the head of a heroin-smuggling ring, which he maintains by murdering off rivals and bribing officials. He drives around in a fancy car driven by a chauffeur, wears stylish suits,

has a sexy woman at his side, and enjoys vacations at the costliest resorts. Yet we might ask, "Can he really enjoy inner happiness, aware that his success has been achieved by bringing misery to so many people?" Clearly, the answer to this question must be no.

When, however, we restrain our own selfish inclinations and regulate our conduct by ethical guidelines, we then achieve a clarity and purity of mind stemming from the realisation that we are not deliberately harming any other living being. By subduing our selfish desires and abstaining from actions that might bring harm to others, we experience the happiness of blamelessness, the joy and ease rooted in a clear conscience. Such happiness arises because we recognise that we are not inflicting pain on any other living being. We do not cause fear in other beings, and thus we give them 'the gift of fearlessness' (*abhayadāna*). In our presence, all other living beings can feel secure: secure about their lives, secure about their belongings, secure about their personal relationships, secure about our communications. This is the first aspect of moral behaviour: to avoid inflicting harm and suffering on others.

But it is not enough merely to observe these principles of restraint. To fulfil the quest for Goodness, we must also cultivate the inner qualities of heart that correspond to these precepts. Thus the positive

qualities we nurture, implicit in the precepts of abstaining from harmful deeds, are: kindness and compassion for others; honesty; respect for the marital rights of others; truthfulness in speech; and sobriety of mind. Those are the positive counterparts of the Five Precepts. If we undertake these two aspects of morality—restraint from evil actions, and the cultivation of wholesome attitudes of mind—then we are embodying in our lives the principle of Goodness, the first foundation of real happiness.

The Beautiful

According to the Buddha, Goodness or ethical purity is the basis, the indispensable basis, for real happiness. But in itself it is not sufficient. To discover a deeper and more substantial happiness than is possible merely through moral goodness, we must take a step forward. This brings us to the next constituent of happiness, which I call the Beautiful. I do not use this word to refer to physical beauty, to a beautiful face and a lovely figure, but to inner beauty, the beauty of the mind. In the Buddha's teaching, the true mark of beauty is beauty of the mind. That is why the

Abhidhamma uses the expressions *sobhana cittas* and *sobhana cetasikas*, beautiful states of mind, beautiful mental factors, to characterise the qualities we must arouse in treading the path to happiness and peace.

To develop the beautiful states of mind, the beautiful consciousness, we begin with certain qualities that are fundamental to ethics. These qualities naturally inhere in the moral state of consciousness, and thus the moral consciousness is the launching pad in our quest for the Beautiful. True beauty cannot be reached by means of morally unwholesome states of mind. However, to travel further along the path to the Beautiful, we must deliberately propel the ethically purifying states of consciousness towards new pinnacles not accessible by the mere observance of moral precepts. In the process, these qualities of mind expand, becoming powerful, lofty, and sublime. They enter upon a whole new landscape, which in terms of Buddhist cosmology belongs not to the realm of sensual experience (*kāmadhātu*) in which we normally dwell, but to the realm of pure form (*rūpadhātu*) accessible through the mastery of the *jhānas* or meditative absorptions.

The Buddha has taught many ways to develop the beautiful consciousness. These include meditation on certain coloured discs called *kasiṇas*, mindfulness of breathing, contemplation of the Three Jewels—the

Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha—and so forth. One group of meditation subjects often mentioned in the texts is the development of four lofty attitudes called the 'divine abodes' (*brahmavihāra*): loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. These are to be developed boundlessly, towards all sentient beings without distinction. They are considered the natural qualities of the divine beings known as the *brahmas*, and thus to develop them in meditation is to make one's mind the abode of inward divinity.

The first of these is the development of loving kindness, *mettā,* and that is the method I will explain here. The characteristic of loving kindness is the wish for the welfare and happiness of others, a wish that is to be extended universally to all living beings. This quality naturally underlies the moral precepts, too, but in this stage of practice we are not developing concern for the welfare and happiness of others merely as a ground for action. We are doing so to purify the mind, to make the mind radiant, beautiful, and sublime. Thus we cultivate loving kindness as a deliberate exercise in meditation.

To do so, one takes up for contemplation people belonging to four categories: oneself, then a dear person, then an indifferent person, and finally a hostile person. One thinks first of oneself, and one

directs the wish for well-being and happiness towards oneself, thinking: "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be free from all harm and suffering." One takes oneself as an example of a person who wants to be well and happy, and uses this as a platform for extending the feeling of loving kindness towards other people. By starting with the wish for one's own welfare and happiness, one comes to understand how other people, too, wish to be well and happy; thus one learns to extend the wish for welfare and happiness to others.

One has to be able to generate a natural, warm, glowing feeling of kindness towards oneself. To make this practice easier, you can begin with your own visual image. See yourself as if in a mirror, smiling and happy, and pervade your image over and over with the thought: "May I be well, may I be happy, may I be free from all harm and suffering." When you gain some degree of proficiency in radiating loving kindness towards yourself—when you feel a warm beam of love going out from your heart and suffusing yourself—you then take other people according to their division into groups.

Begin with a friendly person, someone you consider to be a real friend. However, you should not choose a person with whom you have a close and intimate emotional relationship, such as a husband or a wife, a

girlfriend or a boyfriend; nor should you select your own child. In such cases, emotional attachment can enter disguised as loving kindness and deflect the meditation from its proper course. Instead, you should choose somebody such as a respected teacher or a close friend, someone for whom you have affection and respect, but not a binding emotional relationship.

Invite this friendly person into your mind, and generate, strengthen, and cultivate a wish for the well-being and happiness of your friend. When you can successfully radiate the thought of loving kindness towards your friend—a deep and true wish for your friend's welfare and happiness—you should next choose a neutral person. This might be somebody that you pass each day on the street, or the postman, or the woman working in the supermarket, or the driver of the bus you take to work each day: somebody you see often enough so that you know his or her face, but with whom you have no personal relationship. Your attitude towards this person should be completely neutral: no trace of friendship, no trace of ill will.

You then consider this person to be a human being, just like yourself. To pave the way for the meditation, you might reflect, "Just as I want to be well and happy, so too this person wants to be well and happy." Metaphorically, you take your own mind out of your body and put it into the skin of the other

person. You try to experience the world through the eyes of that neutral person. I don't mean to say that you should work a feat of psychic power, of mind-reading, but rather that you should use your imagination to feel what it is like to be this person that one considers neutral. This enables you to realise that this so-called neutral person is not just a nameless face, but a real human being just like yourself, with the same desire to be well and happy that you have, with the same aversion to pain and suffering that you have.

Having made this imaginary exchange of your personal identity with that person, you then come back into your own skin, so to speak, and radiate the thought: "May this person be well, may he or she be happy, may he or she be free from harm and suffering." You continue this radiation until you can pervade the neutral person with that warm, glowing, radiant wish for his or her welfare and happiness.

When you succeed in the meditation with the neutral person, you next choose a person you might regard as an enemy: a hostile person, a person whose very presence arouses anger in you. You take this person, and again try to feel the world from that person's standpoint. You apply the same technique of 'exchanging personal identities' as I explained in the case of the neutral person. Then, when your mind has been softened by such reflections, you radiate loving

kindness towards the hostile person.

To radiate loving kindness towards a hostile person is often difficult, and for just this reason the Buddha has taught various methods for removing resentment towards such a person. If you apply these methods skilfully, with the right balance of patience and effort, you will eventually overcome your aversion towards the hostile person. Then you will be able to radiate the wish for the real happiness of this person, even if that person is temperamentally mean and cruel. You should persist with your effort until you feel a deep, genuine concern for that hostile person's welfare and happiness, then radiate loving kindness towards that person, over and over, until you can feel the enemy as your friend.

Thus one has learned how to radiate loving kindness towards oneself, a friendly person, a neutral person, and a hostile person. Through practice, one reaches a point where one can radiate loving kindness towards them all equally, without distinction, without discrimination. The Buddhist texts call this stage 'the breaking down of the boundaries', for one no longer erects boundaries between oneself and others, or between one's friends, neutrals, and foes. After consolidating this stage of non-discrimination between different people through repeated practice, one next starts to extend that feeling of loving kindness wider

and wider until it embraces all sentient beings. One radiates it over one's town, over one's country, over one's continent, over the other continents, over the entire world. One radiates the mind of loving kindness universally towards all humans in the world: white, brown, black, and yellow; men and women and children, without reservation; then one includes all sentient beings as well, in all the various planes of existence.

In the famous Mettā Sutta, the Buddha says that just as a mother loves her only son even at the cost of her own life, so one pervades all living beings with this sense of loving kindness. In this way, one transforms loving kindness from the stage of non-discrimination into a truly universal, all-embracing quality of the heart.

This development of loving kindness brings inner beauty to the mind, and beauty of the mind is one of the components of true inner happiness and peace. Suffering, discontent, and dissatisfaction originate from the mental defilements, *kilesas*. As one develops the meditation on loving kindness, this wholesome quality of pure love expands until it becomes boundless, dispelling the darkness of the defilements. As the defilements are dispelled, many other pure, wonderful qualities of mind emerge and blossom: faith, mindfulness, tranquillity, concentration,

equanimity. These pure qualities bring along joy, happiness, and peace even under difficult external conditions. Even if other people treat you harshly, even if you are living in difficult straits, your mind still remains happy and calm. So, this second component of happiness is the Beautiful, beauty of the mind, and one effective way to develop beauty of mind is through the meditation of universal loving kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*).

As one's mind becomes settled and clear, one learns how to sustain attention on a single object, and through this effort the mind enters into stages of deep concentration called *samādhi*. By persistent practice, if one has mature faculties, one might attain those exalted states of consciousness known as the *jhānas*, the meditative absorptions. There are four such states, characterised by sublime joy, bliss, and tranquillity, and their attainment elevates consciousness to exalted levels far above the sphere of sensory experience. These states are the apex of the beautiful consciousness, and their mastery marks the full actualisation of Beauty as a living experience. To treat them adequately would require a detailed discussion, but it is enough to say that the practice of meditation on loving kindness helps to prepare the mind for their attainment.

Truth

Now we come to the third component of happiness, Truth, or more precisely, the realisation of Truth. The Buddha says that even when one's moral virtue is well established and the mind well purified by concentration, one has not yet reached the highest happiness and peace. The meditative absorptions bring ineffable bliss and calm, they suffuse the mind with radiance and light, they lift one up to divine heights, but they still do not fully resolve the problem of suffering. Whatever bliss and calm they induce is imperfect, incomplete, unstable. To reach the highest happiness and peace, one must go a step further. What one needs is wisdom, the direct realisation of Truth.

Realisation of Truth is essential to true happiness because wisdom alone is capable of cutting off the defilements at the root, and it is wisdom that realises Truth. The development of loving kindness suspends the defilements from the mind tentatively, so that they cannot invade consciousness and obsess our thoughts. However, though we may experience peace and purity by developing loving kindness and other such worthy qualities, the defilements continue to subsist deep in the foundations of the mind. If we are not

diligent, they might gain an opportunity to rise up and infiltrate consciousness, causing affliction and distress.

According to the Buddha, the deepest underlying root of all the defilements is ignorance (*avijjā*). So long as ignorance remains, the defilements persist, though perhaps in a dormant rather than active condition. To make the mind completely impervious to the machinations of the defilements, we thus have to eliminate ignorance. When ignorance is eradicated, all the defilements vanish along with them, permanently and irreversibly.

Ignorance, according to the Buddha, means not understanding things as they really are, i.e. not understanding the true nature of the phenomena comprising our own experience. For each of us, the world, in the ultimate sense, consists of our own 'five aggregates' (*pañcakkhandha*)—form, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness. The world is 'the all' of the senses, their objects, and the corresponding types of consciousness. The instrument we must use to eliminate ignorance is wisdom (*paññā*). Wisdom therefore means the correct understanding of things as they really are, the correct understanding of our world: the five aggregates, the six sense spheres, and the various types of consciousness.

This wisdom is not reducible to mere conceptual knowledge, but must be direct and perceptual. It is not arrived at by a process of objectification, by standing back and distancing ourselves from our experience, but requires us to take a highly personal 'insider's view' in which we remain at once utterly immersed in our subjectivity yet unidentified with it. This view can only be obtained through systematic training. To arrive at the wisdom that cuts off the roots of suffering, one has to enter the stage of Buddhist meditative training called the development of insight (*vipassanā bhāvanā*).

Insight means seeing directly into the true nature of our own body and mind, into the constitution of experience, and that is precisely what is aimed at by the practice of insight meditation. First, we have to develop a capacity for concentration, for sustained attention, by collecting the mind into one point through such practices as loving kindness meditation, the kasiṇas, or mindfulness of breathing. Then we use the concentrated mind, focused and unified, to explore the nature of experience as it unfolds from one moment to the next.

The key factor in generating insight is mindfulness (*sati*): close, careful attention to what is happening to us and within us on the successive occasions of perception. Mindfulness does not attempt to

manipulate the content of experience. It simply observes what is happening at each moment as it is actually happening. When we investigate our own experience with this concentrated, collected mind, observing everything with bare attention, we begin to understand the real nature of all conditioned things, for the nature of all conditioned existence is laid bare in our own mind and body. Within our own body and mind, within our five aggregates, we know and see the nature of the entire world.

As mindfulness deepens, as we attend to the five aggregates, we see that they all share three characteristics. They are impermanent (*anicca*), arising and passing away countless times at every moment; they are vulnerable to suffering (*dukkha*); and they are empty of any substantial core that might be identified as a self (*anattā*). These three characteristics are inherent in everything conditioned. They are the true nature of all formations (*saṅkhārā*), of all things formed by causes and conditions. We can observe that everything within our experience arises and passes, and we thereby know that everything that comes into being everywhere must also pass away: whatever begins must end. We can observe that whatever aspect of our experience totters and collapses exposes us to suffering, and we thereby know that there is nothing in the conditioned world that is worth clinging to, for

to cling is to suffer. We can see that all the constituents of our own being, our own five aggregates, are insubstantial, devoid of intrinsic essence, and we thereby know that all phenomena everywhere are without substance or selfhood. This direct experiential knowledge of the personal domain opens the door to universal knowledge. By knowing the nature of reality within the complex of our own five aggregates, we gain a certitude about the entire conditioned world throughout boundless space and time.

But the truth about the conditioned world, in its full extent, is still not the ultimate truth. It is still a truth bound up with what is conditioned, formed, and perishable, and thus a defective truth. It is, in fact, only half the truth accessible to us, half the truth we must come to know. The Buddha says, "First comes insight into the real nature of phenomena, afterwards comes knowledge of Nibbāna" (*pubbe dhammaṭṭhitiñāṇaṃ pacchā nibbāne ñāṇaṃ*, Saṃyutta Nikāya 12:70). As we contemplate the five aggregates, the mind becomes poised in unruffled equanimity, gaining a vantage point from which it can observe with crystal clarity the three characteristics stamped on all the constituents of being. When insight wisdom reaches its culmination, it strains the limits of the conditioned, and then the mind breaks out from conditioned phenomena into the unconditioned. By

penetrating the nature of the conditioned world, it comes out on the other side of that world, steps into the domain of the unconditioned, the transcendent truth. And it is this supreme or ultimate truth (*parama-sacca*) that the Buddha calls Nibbāna, deliverance from all suffering: "This is the supreme noble wisdom, the knowledge of the destruction of all suffering. One's deliverance, being founded upon truth, is unshakable. For that is false which has a deceptive nature, and that is true which has an undeceptive nature, namely, Nibbāna. Therefore one who possesses this, possesses the supreme foundation of truth. For this is the supreme noble truth, Nibbāna, which has an undeceptive nature" (Majjhima Nikāya 140).

A Triadic Unity

It is important to note that until Truth is fully realised and embedded in our being, our accomplishments in the pursuit of Goodness and Beauty are partial and fragile. Without the realisation of the transcendent Truth, Goodness, as moral virtue, has to be maintained with diligence. We are tempted to transgress the precepts, and if our determination to

follow the decrees of morality falters, we may throw conscience to the wind and submit to our raw impulses. Thus Goodness not founded on direct realisation of Truth is permeable by its opposite. The Buddha says that it is only with the first breakthrough to ultimate truth, the attainment of stream-entry (*sotāpatti*), that commitment to the Five Precepts becomes inviolable; and it is only the arahant or liberated one who has eradicated the deep tendencies from which immoral conduct springs. Thus the realisation of Truth is necessary to secure, stabilise, and perfect the achievement of Goodness.

The same applies to Beauty. The beautiful mind, attained by cultivating such divine qualities as love and compassion, must be kept beautiful by constant vigilance. Like any well-kept garden, if we don't water it, weed it, and prune it day by day, it will become wild, disorderly, unsightly. The calm, bliss, and radiance of the concentrated mind are the rewards of earnest effort, and we cannot take these rewards for granted. Without heedfulness, the defilements will again break through into the topsoil of consciousness, distorting our thoughts and perverting our emotions. By attaining the jhānas we might enjoy bliss and peace for aeons, but that bliss and peace will not be unshakable. In the absence of Truth, our attainments may decline, fade away, and vanish. It is only through

the realisation of Truth that the defilements are "cut off at the root, made baseless, annihilated, unable to arise again in the future." Thus it is only through the realisation of Truth that Beauty becomes for us an enduring achievement.

So we see that among the three strands that make up true happiness—Goodness, Beauty, and Truth—Truth stands on a level of its own, incommensurate with the other two. It is at once the ground upon which Goodness and Beauty are stabilised, and the apex upon which they converge when taken to their furthest limits. Truth anchors Goodness and Beauty in the mind so they can never be lost, while at the same time it brings to perfection their own inherent potentials for excellence.

To sum up, when we analyse closely the concept of happiness, we see that it consists of three strands: Goodness, Beauty, and Truth; or ethical purity, beauty of mind, and realisation of truth. We begin embodying Goodness in our lives by observing the precepts, the codified principles of ethical behaviour. Then, with Goodness as the foundation, we strive for Beauty. We develop a beautiful mind through one of the exercises of mental development that lead to the purification of mind, of which I have discussed only one, the development of loving kindness. Then, when the mind becomes pure, calm, and radiant by means of

concentration, we strive for the realisation of Truth. We use the concentrated mind to investigate the nature of our own experience. First, we realise the nature of conditioned reality as manifested in our own 'five aggregates' of bodily and mental phenomena, and then we realise the unconditioned reality, Nibbāna, the supreme truth. The realisation of Nibbāna brings to fulfilment all three components of the goal, Goodness, Beauty, and Truth, merged into a triadic unity, an indissoluble whole. This whole confers upon our lives peace, harmony, and the highest happiness, what the Buddha called the unshakable liberation of the heart.

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