

NEWSLETTER
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CHOOSING TO TRAIN

In our training, we have the choice to see our suffering as an opportunity to train, or something to be run away from, to be solved, to be relieved. On some level, we all believe that happiness is our due. We believe that if we get everything right, we will be happy. This is a delusion. Happiness is just a feeling that, like all feelings, is impermanent. No matter how we arrange things, no matter how much merit we accumulate, no matter how wealthy, or educated, or beautiful, or popular, etc. we become, happiness is uncertain and, even when experienced, will eventually fade. As long as we are attached to happiness, we will naturally be averse to unhappiness, and life guarantees at least occasional unhappiness to us all. The Buddha taught that life consists of birth, and then inevitably, sickness, old age (if you live that long), and death. This cannot be avoided. And yet we often expect our suffering to go away, especially if we train. Somehow everything will eventually feel good. This is also a delusion. Training is not changing how we feel. Training is letting go of attachment to how we feel. And that leads eventually to true peace.

Because we believe that we should be happy, when we feel unhappy, we tend to believe that something is wrong. And if we are training and unhappiness arises, we feel cheated. This is not what we expected, and so, at these times, there may be an inclination to turn away from our training. However natural this turning away might feel, all this would succeed in doing would be to delay our eventually dealing with the source of our suffering.

Be aware that when we commit ourselves to training we beckon to our difficulties; in a sense, we invite them to arise. One important aspect of training is dealing with our habits, i.e. those ways of thinking, speaking, and acting to which we cling. Since attachment or clinging is the source of our dissatisfaction or suffering, only by dealing with these habits, by letting them go, by no longer allowing them to control us, can we come to know peace. And we cannot deal with them unless we are aware of them and don't turn away from them. Once we express our willingness to train, they come to be shown to us. We are slowly (and sometimes more quickly) given the opportunity to face them.

By truly being willing to see what is there, to accept and embrace it, to allow ourselves to be aware of our difficulties: our judgmentalism, our anger, our fear, our painful memories, our confusion, etc., we begin to deal with, to convert these difficulties. So, when we say that we wish to train, that we are willing, Something takes us up on it, and we get opportunities to see what needs help, change, conversion.

It is just that what we see can sometimes feel overwhelming. That is when our commitment to daily training really proves invaluable. It forms a foundation on which we build faith and trust in our practice of the Buddha-Dharma. Our willingness can keep us going even when we feel overwhelmed by what we see. And as my Master often said, no matter how overwhelmed we may feel, we truly never get more than we can handle (even though at times it can feel like it).

In our practice, we continuously have the choice of whether to train, or to turn our backs on our training. We may want to just push our problems away, and the thought may arise: "I will train when this is gone, dealt with, etc." Or we can work on understanding that this problem is our training, and that we need to make an effort to accept and embrace it. Viewed with this attitude of mind, spiritual, mental, or physical discomfort becomes a blessing, because it makes us want to train, it reminds us to train, to actually look our suffering in the eye, so to speak, and deal with it; not turn away from it as has previously been our habit.

So, we should always do our best to be willing to choose to train; to accept and embrace our suffering; to see it as an opportunity to train. And when this willingness seems beyond our power, try to be willing to be willing. Training is hard and the reward is great.

Teachers of Buddhism sometimes appear to emphasize the negative in training, rather

than the positive, e.g. the aspect of the practice which involves choosing to face and deal with our suffering or that which is unpleasant, rather than the peace and harmony that is the eventual result of that continued choice. Some may find this apparent emphasis discouraging, or even repellent. The reason teachers do this is very simple: we will not realize the result unless we face the problem, and very few of us are willing to face the problem without much guidance and encouragement. We simply don't want to look at our suffering, our discomfort, our unhappiness, the results of our clinging. Therefore, anything which tries to point these out is unwelcome and may be defined as negativism. Once so categorized, we may feel that we can ignore it. To do so however, is to turn our backs on being able to do something about ourselves, and thus eventually find the Truth: That which satisfies our deepest longing.

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