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Everything is teaching us
Giving up good and evil
The truth is that in this world of ours there is nothing to be anxious about. Nothing is inherently tragic or delightful. One who truly has a feel for the Dhamma doesn't need to take hold of anything and dwells in ease.
It sticks on the skin and goes into the flesh; from the flesh it gets into the bones. It's like an insect on a tree that eats through the bark, into the wood and then into the core, until finally the tree dies.
We've grown up like that. It gets buried deep inside. Our parents taught us grasping and attachment, giving meaning to things, believing firmly that we exist as a self-entity and that things belong to us. From our birth that's what we are taught. We hear this over and over again, and it penetrates our hearts and stays there as our habitual feeling. We're taught to get things, to accumulate and hold on to them, to see them as important and as ours. This is what our parents know, and this is what they teach us. So it gets into our minds, into our bones.
When we take an interest in meditation and hear the teaching of a spiritual guide it's not easy to understand. It doesn't really grab us. We're taught not to see and to do things the old way, but when we hear the teaching, it doesn't penetrate the mind; we only hear it with our ears. People just don't know themselves. So we sit and listen to teachings, but it's just sound entering the ears. It doesn't get inside and affect us. It's like we're boxing and we keep hitting the other guy but he doesn't go down. We remain stuck in our self-conceit. The wise have said that moving a mountain from one place to another is easier than moving the self-conceit of people.

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wise can teach us to our dying day, but they can't get rid of it. It remains hard and fast. Our wrong ideas and bad tendencies remain so solid and unbudging, and we're not even aware of it. So the wise have said that removing this self-conceit and turning wrong understanding into right understanding is about the hardest thing to do.
For us puthujjana (worldly beings) to progress on to being kalya ñajana (virtuous beings) is so hard. Puthujjana means people who are thickly obscured, who are dark, who are stuck deep in this darkness and obscurity. The kalyañajana has made things lighter. We teach people to lighten, but they don't want to do that because they don't understand their situation, their condition of obscurity. So they keep on wandering in their confused state. If we come across a pile of buffalo dung we won't think it's ours and we won't want to pick it up. We will just leave it where it is because we know what it is. It's like that. That's what's good in the way of the impure. Evil is the food of bad people. If you teach them about doing good they're not interested, but prefer to stay as they are because they don't see the harm in it. Without seeing the harm there's no way things can be rectified. If you recognize it, then you think, "Oh! My whole pile of dung doesn't have the value of a small piece of gold!" And then you will want gold instead; you won't want the dung anymore. If you don't recognize this you remain the owner of a pile of dung. Even if you are offered a diamond or a ruby, you won't be interested. That's the 'good' of the impure. Gold, jewels and diamonds are considered something good in the realm of humans. The foul and rotten is good for flies and other insects. If you put perfume on it they would all flee. What those with wrong view consider good is like that. That's the 'good' for those with wrong view, for the defiled. It doesn't smell good, but if we tell them it stinks they'll say it's fragrant. They can't reverse this view very easily. So it's not easy to teach them.

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there's a dead animal, wherever there's something rotten, that's where they'll go. You don't need to call them. They just go. Wrong view is like that. It delights in that kind of thing. The stinking and rotten is what smells good to it. It's bogged down and immersed in that. What's sweet smelling to a bee is not sweet to a fly. The fly doesn't see anything good or valuable in it and has no craving for it.
There is difficulty in practice, but in anything we undertake we have to pass through difficulty to reach ease. In Dhamma practice we begin with the truth of dukkha, the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of existence. But as soon as we experience this we lose heart. We don't want to look at it. Dukkha is really the truth, but we want to get around it somehow. It's similar to the way we don't like to look at old people, but prefer to look at those who are young.

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Buddhism is for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering. What should we do not to suffer anymore? When dukkha arises we should investigate to see the causes of its arising. Then once we know that, we can practice to remove those causes. Suffering, origination, cessation. In order to bring it to cessation we have to understand the path of practice. Then once we travel the path to fulfillment, dukkha will no longer arise. In Buddhism, this is the way out.
Opposing our habits creates some suffering. Generally we are afraid of suffering. If something will make us suffer, we don't want to do it. We are interested in what appears to be good and beautiful, but we feel that anything involving suffering is bad. It's not like that. Suffering is sacca-dhamma, truth. If there is suffering in the heart it becomes the cause that makes you think about escaping. It leads you to contemplate. You won't sleep so soundly because you will be intent on investigating to find out what is really going on, trying to see causes and their results. Happy people don't develop wisdom. They are asleep. It's like a dog that eats its fill. Afterwards it doesn't want to do anything. It can sleep all day. It won't bark if a burglar comes. It's too full, too tired. But if you only give it a little food it will be alert and awake. If someone tries to come sneaking around, it will jump up and start barking. Have you seen that?

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most people can't follow this. That's how it is. So I've sought all kinds of means to get this across. One thing I often say is, no matter if we are delighted or upset, happy or suffering, shedding tears or singing songs, never mind. Living in this world we are in a cage. We don't get beyond this condition of being in a cage. Even if you are rich, you are living in a cage. If you are poor, you are living in a cage. If you sing and dance, you're singing and dancing in a cage. If you watch a movie, you're watching it in a cage.
What is this cage? It is the cage of birth, the cage of aging, the cage of illness, the cage of death. In this way, we are imprisoned in the world. "This is mine." "That belongs to me." We don't know what we really are or what we're doing. Actually all we are doing is accumulating suffering for ourselves. It's not something far away that causes our suffering but we don't look at ourselves. However much happiness and comfort we may have, having been born we cannot avoid aging, we must fall ill and we must die. This is dukkha itself, here and now.
We can always be afflicted with pain or illness. It can happen at any time. It's like we've stolen something. They could come to arrest us at any time because we've done the deed. That's our situation. There is danger and trouble. We exist among harmful things; birth, aging and illness reign over our lives. We can't go elsewhere and escape them. They can come catch us at any time. It's always a good opportunity for them. So we have to cede this to them and accept the situation. We have to plead guilty. If we do, the sentence won't be so heavy. If we don't, we suffer enormously. If we plead guilty, they'll go easy on us. We won't be incarcerated too long.

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reside in them and we are merely residing along with them. When these bodies reach the end of pain and illness, and finally break up and die, that is not us dying. So don't hold on to any of this. Instead, you have to contemplate the matter and then your grasping will gradually be exhausted. When you see correctly, wrong understanding will stop.
Birth has created this burden for us. But generally, we people can't accept this. We think that not being born would be the greatest evil. Dying and not being born would be the worst thing of all. That's how we view things. We usually only think about how much we want in the future. And then we desire further: "In the next life, may I be born among the gods, or may I be born as a wealthy person."
We're asking for an even heavier burden! But we think that that will bring happiness. To really penetrate the Dhamma purely is thus very difficult. We need to rely on serious investigation. Such thinking is an entirely different way from what the Buddha teaches. That way is heavy. The Buddha said to let go of it and cast it away. But we think, "I can't let go." So we keep carrying it and it keeps getting heavier. Because we were born we have this heaviness.

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is a rich person. I think this kind of knowledge is really worth studying. The knowledge taught in the Buddha's way is something worth learning, worth reflecting on.
Then, the pure Dhamma of practice goes beyond that. It's a lot deeper. Some of you may not be able to understand it. Just take the Buddha's words that there is no more birth for him, that birth and becoming are finished. Hearing this makes you uncomfortable. To state it directly, the Buddha said that we should not be born, because that is suffering. Just this one thing, birth, the Buddha focused on, contemplating it and realizing its gravity. Being born, all dukkha comes along with that. It happens simultaneously with birth. When we come into this world we get eyes, a mouth, a nose. It all comes along only because of birth. But if we hear about dying and not being born again, we feel it would be utter ruin. We don't want to go there. But the deepest teaching of the Buddha is like this.
Why are we suffering now? Because we were born. So we are taught to put an end to birth. This is not just talking about the body being born and the body dying. That much is easy to see. A child can understand it. The breath comes to an end, the body dies and then it just lies there. This is what we usually mean when we talk about death. But a breathing dead person? That's something we don't know about. A dead person who can walk and talk and smile is something we haven't thought about. We only know about the corpse that's no longer breathing. That's what we call death.

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We don't recognize clearly that there is only suffering, because when it stops we see happiness there. We seize on it and get stuck there. We don't really see the truth that everything is just arising and ceasing.
The Buddha summed things up by saying that there is only arising and ceasing, and nothing outside of that. This is difficult to listen to. But one who truly has a feel for the Dhamma doesn't need to take hold of anything and dwells in ease. That's the truth.

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thinking in the ordinary way, that leads to tears.
In truth, if we really know the Dhamma and see it continuously, nothing is anything at all; there is only arising and passing away. There's no real happiness or suffering. The heart is at peace then, when there is no happiness or suffering. When there is happiness and suffering, there is becoming and birth. We usually create one kind of kamma, which is the attempt to stop suffering and produce happiness. That's what we want. But what we want is not real peace; it's happiness and suffering. The aim of the Buddha's teaching is to practice to create a type of kamma that leads beyond happiness and suffering and that will bring peace. But we aren't able to think like that. We can only think that having happiness will bring us peace. If we have happiness, we think that's good enough.
Thus we humans wish for things in abundance. If we get a lot, that's good. Generally that's how we think. Doing good is supposed to bring good results, and if we get that we're happy. We think that's all we need to do and we stop there. But where does good come to conclusion? It doesn't remain. We keep going back and forth, experiencing good and bad, trying day and night to seize on to what we feel is good.
The Buddha's teaching is that first we should give up evil and then we practice what is good. Second, he said that we should give up evil and give up the good as well, not having attachment to it because that is also one kind of fuel. When there is something that is fuel it will eventually burst into flame. Good is fuel. Bad is fuel. Speaking on this level kills people. People aren't able to follow it. So we have to turn back to the beginning and teach morality. Don't harm each other. Be responsible in your work and don't harm or exploit others. The Buddha taught this, but just this much isn't enough to stop.

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Not many people really come back to this point and contemplate to understand according to the principles of the Buddha's way. But if we have faith in the Buddha's way, it will repay us. If people genuinely rely on the Three Jewels then practicing is easy.
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The Buddha summed it up by saying that there is only a mass of suffering. Suffering is born and suffering ceases. That's all there is. We pounce on and grab at it again and again, pouncing on arising, pouncing on cessation, never really understanding it. When dukkha arises we call that suffering. When it ceases we call that happiness. It's all old stuff, arising and ceasing. We are taught to watch body and mind arising and ceasing. There's nothing else outside of this. To sum it up, there is no happiness; there's only dukkha. We recognize suffering as suffering when it arises. Then when it ceases, we consider that to be happiness. We see it and designate it as such, but it isn't. It's just dukkha ceasing. Dukkha arises and ceases, arises and ceases, and we pounce on it and catch hold of it. Happiness appears and we are pleased. Unhappiness appears and we are distraught. It's really all the same, mere arising and ceasing. When there is arising there's something, and when there is ceasing, it's gone. This is where we doubt. Thus it's nothing that dukkha arises and ceases, and outside of that, there is nothing. When you come down to it, there is only suffering. But we don't see clearly.
We don't recognize clearly that there is only suffering, because when it stops we see happiness there. We seize on it and get stuck there. We don't really see the truth that everything is just arising and ceasing.
The Buddha summed things up by saying that there is only arising and ceasing, and nothing outside of that. This is difficult to listen to. But one who truly has a feel for the Dhamma doesn't need to take hold of anything and dwells in ease. That's the truth.

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Everything is teaching us
thinking in the ordinary way, that leads to tears.
In truth, if we really know the Dhamma and see it continuously, nothing is anything at all; there is only arising and passing away. There's no real happiness or suffering. The heart is at peace then, when there is no happiness or suffering. When there is happiness and suffering, there is becoming and birth. We usually create one kind of kamma, which is the attempt to stop suffering and produce happiness. That's what we want. But what we want is not real peace; it's happiness and suffering. The aim of the Buddha's teaching is to practice to create a type of kamma that leads beyond happiness and suffering and that will bring peace. But we aren't able to think like that. We can only think that having happiness will bring us peace. If we have happiness, we think that's good enough.
Thus we humans wish for things in abundance. If we get a lot, that's good. Generally that's how we think. Doing good is supposed to bring good results, and if we get that we're happy. We think that's all we need to do and we stop there. But where does good come to conclusion? It doesn't remain. We keep going back and forth, experiencing good and bad, trying day and night to seize on to what we feel is good.
The Buddha's teaching is that first we should give up evil and then we practice what is good. Second, he said that we should give up evil and give up the good as well, not having attachment to it because that is also one kind of fuel. When there is something that is fuel it will eventually burst into flame. Good is fuel. Bad is fuel. Speaking on this level kills people. People aren't able to follow it. So we have to turn back to the beginning and teach morality. Don't harm each other. Be responsible in your work and don't harm or exploit others. The Buddha taught this, but just this much isn't enough to stop.

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