

On Right Intention

In this article, I would like to discuss the second element of the Eightfold Path, called Samma Sankappa, which can be translated as right intention, right attitude, or right motivation. According to the Buddha, right intention has three aspects: the intention of renunciation, the intention of non-ill will, and the intention of non-cruelty.

Let's start with the intention of renunciation. When you hear the term renunciation, you might feel uneasy and reluctant to accept this intention, as it may evoke the idea of giving up the world. However, this renunciation refers to a mental attitude, not necessarily becoming a monk or retreating to a Himalayan cave. To understand this intention properly, we should briefly revisit last month's article on Right View. If we truly grasp the essence of Right View, the intention of renunciation will naturally follow.

So, what is the essence of Right View? As the Buddha once said, "I teach only this: suffering and freedom from suffering." Yes, that's the essence—the essence of Right View and the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

We all know and have experienced suffering, both internally and externally. However, we often lack experience in freedom from suffering. This is due to our ignorance of its causes, or because our understanding of these causes is shallow and merely intellectual. What is the cause of suffering? It is craving ; craving for sensuality, craving to become, and craving not to become. But why does craving exist? It arises from people's endless longing to be happy. In pursuit of happiness, people crave sensual fulfillment, desire to be something, or eager to get rid of something.

However, such strategies for happiness never truly fulfill their purpose. Relying on external conditions for happiness will never bring true fulfillment. Any happiness dependent on worldly conditions is impermanent. We need a deep understanding and firm resolution regarding the futility of worldly happiness obtained through external conditions. Every conditioned thing is impermanent, and every conditioned thing lacks substantiality. Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly advises, "Do not rely on conditional things for your true happiness." Instead, we should rely on something trustworthy. And what is trustworthy? It is nothing other than your Buddhahood—your

original Buddha nature. You may ask, "Where is my Buddha nature? Where is my Buddhahood?" The answer is, our Buddhahood is here and now. We have always been with it; we arise from it. We have merely forgotten our original nature, as if we are asleep. All we need is to wake up and recognize our true nature. When we become aware and alert, we align with and even become our own Buddhahood, sometimes momentarily, sometimes fully. Regardless, our innate nature is Buddha nature.

The intention of renunciation means the intention to return to our Buddha nature. How? By being aware and alert in the present moment. Dwelling in that awareness, we dwell in the realm of Buddhahood. The intention to dwell in that realm is the true sense of renunciation. In other words, the right intention of renunciation is the intention to return to your true Self, which is the unconditional Self—another name for Buddhahood.

There is a famous statement from the Buddha, uttered a few days before his passing away:

Attadipa viharati, attasarasa ananna sarana.

This means:

Dwell in the island of your Self, take refuge in your Self, not in another refuge.

Here, "Self" does not refer to the egocentric self confined within our mortal body and conditioned mind. It refers to the unconditional True Self. Returning to that True Self is the true refuge and the true meaning of the intention of renunciation.

Now, let us discuss the second and third aspects of right intention: the intention of non-ill will and the intention of non-cruelty. In other words, loving-kindness and compassion. In any situation, loving-kindness and compassion should be our default mindset for our own mental well-being. While these attitudes are directed toward others, the first person who benefits is oneself, as love and kindness cultivate a peaceful mind. The same applies to compassion; someone who is cruel and hostile

can never be happy and peaceful. However, a compassionate heart enjoys peace and lightness.

How can we develop loving-kindness and compassion? While there are various ways to cultivate these qualities, I want to focus on a method related to the first aspect of right intention, the intention of renunciation. As mentioned earlier, the intention of renunciation is the intention to return to your original Buddha nature, to dwell in pure awareness. One fundamental characteristic of this pure awareness is non-egocentric equanimity. Why is it non-egocentric? Because when you enter pure awareness, the sense of self dissolves. There is no sense of a separate - "I" - there is only boundless and choice-less awareness that embraces all beings, including your body and mind. Loving-kindness and compassion are the radiation and resonance of our Buddha nature.

Therefore, deepening our understanding of our Buddha nature as pure awareness and immersing ourselves in that boundless awareness is an authentic and direct way to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion.

With metta,
Bhante Anuttara