

The Seven Treasures

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The other day I was reading some comments made by a vipassana teacher who'd gone over to Asia and studied at a couple of monasteries. He commented that the laypeople over there, as far as he could see, didn't have much of a practice. They just came and supported the monastery. Which is a peculiar thing to say—as if Buddhist practice were just practicing mindfulness, practicing meditation. Supporting a monastery is also a practice. Observing the precepts, developing all sorts of good qualities in the mind: These are all part of the practice.

When the Buddha gave his summary of the teachings—“The non-doing of any evil, the full development of skillfulness, the cleansing of the mind: these are the Buddha's teachings”—all of those things are part of the practice. All those things are part of the path.

So it's important that we understand this, that we're not just here to meditate or to master the techniques. We're also here to develop good qualities in the mind all-around. Because these are our treasures. The Buddha talks of them as treasures—the kind of treasure, he says, that fire can't burn, water can't wash away, thieves can't steal. It may sound like spiritual materialism but, hey, it's better to be spiritually wealthy than spiritually poor. If you're spiritually poor, you look for your happiness in all the wrong places.

There's a traditional list of what the spiritual treasures are. There are seven altogether. They start with conviction—conviction in the Buddha's awakening, conviction in the principle of karma. You're convinced that the Buddha really did discover that there is a deathless and that it was possible for him to do that through his own actions. That's his discovery of the fourth type of karma: the one that leads to the end of karma. That's what we're convinced really happened, that he was able to do it. And it wasn't any special quality of his that pertained only to him alone that enabled him to do it. As he said, it was based on qualities of being resolute, ardent, mindful—all of which are things that everybody can develop if they put their minds to it. In other words, we're convinced that we can do it, too.

This means that you always have to look very carefully at what you're doing, because that's where you're going to learn this path. If you spend all your time in abstractions, you miss the path. You don't see the path happening right in front of you. So you want to be careful about what you do, what you say, what you think, because these things have consequences. And if you're very careful, you find a level of action that takes you beyond the consequences. But in order to develop that kind of precision, that kind of skill, you have to work on

ordinary, everyday actions: what you do, what you say, how you interact with other people around you, the work you take up around the monastery. This is important.

Ajaan Fuang often commented on how clean and meticulous Ajaan Mun was. Everything was very well-cared for; everything was kept very clean. Even living out in the forest, *especially* living out in the forest, you've got to be clean and neat. Because otherwise the forest starts taking over. The practice starts from very simple things like that: taking care of your surroundings. And as you take care of your surroundings, it teaches you how to take care of your mind.

The next principle is virtue, abstaining from anything that's going to cause harm. We've got the five precepts, we've got the eight, the ten, the 227 and then all the minor rules. They're there for a purpose, to develop qualities of the mind. At the same time, they create a good environment around you: a sense that if you don't do harm, harm doesn't come to you. It's a lot easier to live in a society, live in a group, where you're principled in your behavior. Other people are less put upon, there's less sense of revenge or retaliation going back and forth. So it creates a good environment around you and a good environment inside.

One of Ajaan Mun's major complaints about how the Dhamma was being packaged in Bangkok in his day and age had to do with the fact that the precepts were defined simply in terms of your actions and your words. That was it, as if virtue simply had to do with externals. As Ajaan Mun pointed out many, many times: The essence of virtue is in the intention. Intention is a quality of mind, so virtue is a quality of mind. It's a quality you want to ensconce in your mind, because it makes life easier for you and for the people around you.

To back it up, there are two other treasures. *Hiri*, which is translated as shame, but it can also be translated as self-esteem, in the sense that it's not a matter of being ashamed of yourself. You actually regard yourself in a good light, such a good light that when lower behavior or lower thoughts occur to you, you realize that they're not becoming to you. They're beneath you. You're above them. You'd be ashamed to do those things. That's a quality of self-esteem, self-respect.

And then there's *ottappa*, which can be translated as concern, or as fear of the consequences of evil. In other words, you care enough about yourself that you wouldn't want to do anything that would cause suffering. You care enough about the people around you that you wouldn't want to do anything to cause them suffering. You're afraid of the dangers that your actions could bring about if they were unskillful. It's a healthy kind of fear.

Another treasure is learning: listening, reading, learning what you can from the wisdom of the past, so that you don't have to keep reinventing the

Dhamma wheel all the time. As the Buddha once said, listening to the Dhamma gives all kinds of benefits. Things you didn't understand before, you begin to understand. Things you never heard of before, you hear. Things you may have heard of that you understood a little bit: You listen to them again, you get to think about them again, you understand them better. Your doubts are put to rest, your views are straightened out, and your mind becomes radiant. Those are the benefits that come from listening to the real Dhamma.

In other words, it brings your mind to peace—and not just in a soft, reassuring way. Sometimes it's chastising. But again, there's a sense of peace that comes when you realize that you've been careless in your actions, it's brought to your attention, and the mind pulls back from its carelessness. That can also make the mind radiant.

The sixth treasure is relinquishment: learning how to give things up, realizing that in giving things up it's not self-deprivation. There's a trade. Our different goals, our different aims in life can pull in lots of different directions. There's a school of thought that encourages people to excel in all directions, to develop all their potentials to the max, but the question is, is that possible? Some things you've got to give up if you want something of higher value.

And particularly learning how to give up particular comforts and pastimes that waste your time in meditation. You don't want the habit of mind that's constantly looking for instant gratification and so is always looking to relax. You don't want that kind of habit to be in charge of your mind. A healthy sense of self-regard, a healthy sense of self-esteem requires that you make whatever sacrifices are needed for your own true benefit. The clearer an idea you have of what really is your true benefit, the more obvious it becomes which things are getting in the way and which things are not, which things need to be given up—which chess pieces have to be sacrificed in order for you to reach checkmate.

At the same time, you're developing good qualities in mind, especially in terms of giving up material things. The mind becomes a lot more spacious. If you're concerned about keeping this and keeping that and hanging on to this and hanging on to that, so many things could happen to threaten those desires. Your mind gets more and more narrow, more and more confining, because it's locked onto these things for fear that something will happen that'll take them away. But if the mind can realize that these things are going to have to go someplace, sometime, anyhow, you can develop the generosity that comes from seeing that other people may need them and you happily give them away. Your mind becomes a lot more open, a much more spacious mind. That's a mind that's a lot easier to live in. This is one of the immediate rewards that come from relinquishment.

The seventh treasure is discernment, wisdom. This is probably the most

important of all seven. As Ajaan Lee once said, if you have wisdom and discernment, then even if you're born poor, if all you have is a machete to your name, you can still establish yourself in the world. And on the other side, if you've got all the advantages of the world in terms of birth, wealth, education, but if you don't have real discernment, real wisdom: Those things can turn around and hurt you. Think of the blessing, *ayu, vanno, sukham, balam*—long-life, happiness, strength, beauty; the blessings that wish for wealth, a position of influence: These things are dangerous if you don't have discernment. They can turn around and cut your throat.

I learned this evening of a young woman I met several years back, very good looking, and it turns out she's a kleptomaniac. It's destroyed all her relationships; it's destroyed the family. Her family, her parents have been sued to the tune of seven million baht over her behavior in the past. Here she is: The family is wealthy, she's good looking, but she used those things to hurt not only herself but also the people around her. This is a case of what happens when you have the benefits of what's usually thought of as meritorious behavior—good looks, wealth—but you don't have the discernment to use them properly.

So discernment is what keeps all the other treasures safe. It keeps them in line so that they don't turn on you. You have a strong sense of what is for your own long-term welfare and happiness, and learning to regard all the other things that come your way in the light of that insight. This way, when other things tempt you, you learn to look at them in the larger picture. When greed, anger and delusion come, when lust and fear come, you don't believe them. You realize that these defilements focus on only a very narrow picture, a very narrow slice of life, and they almost willfully block out everything else, so that whatever you desire looks really good or whatever you hate looks really bad.

But discernment is a quality that opens you up to look at things in terms of the larger picture. You refuse to allow the mind to block things out. You learn how to look through your denial, look through those walls that the mind puts up around the things that it wants or the things that it hates. You can see the whole picture—in particular the whole picture of what happens in the long term if you act on those desires. Where will they lead you? Will they lead you where you want to go?

And you have the wisdom not only to see this but also to figure out ways to pull yourself away from what you would enjoy doing but you know is going to lead to bad results. Or things that you don't enjoy doing but you know they'll lead to good results: You have the wisdom to talk yourself into how to do the those things, too, to stick with whatever's required to lead to that true happiness, no matter how easy or difficult it may be. That's a part of discernment as well: not just the seeing of the goal that you want, but also understanding the ins and outs of your own mind so that you can talk yourself

into letting go of your desires that lead away from your true goal, and talk yourself into doing what you really need to do.

So of all the treasures, discernment is probably the most important, but they all work together. You have to realize that anything you do that helps develop these qualities in your mind is all part of your practice. Don't think that the practice is just what you do when you're doing formal meditation. It's the way you live your whole life.

And when the practice is complete, then you achieve what's called completion. The Buddha's last word was *sampadetha*, become consummate—in other words, fulfilling the teachings in an all-around way, mastering them in an all-around way. The more complete the causes, the more complete the results.