

Peace

Rev. Kinrei Bassis

Being at peace is the heart of Buddhism. When I think about what I am trying to do in meditation, I am trying to view everything that arises as the Buddha; that nothing ever needs to be pushed away or grasped after. In my daily life, I am trying to bring a peaceful heart to whatever I experience, without qualification.

Although I have been meditating and training for twenty-five years, I still find it is very easy to get lost and absorbed in the flow of my life and lose my perspective on what is important and real. I often find myself getting caught up in the details of my day, allowing my mind to be filled with worries and fears, desires and dreams. In meditation, I am trying to be still and quiet enough to be aware of what I am thinking and feeling.

For instance, I have spent many days allowing patterns of worried thoughts to fill me. When I am worrying, I need to remind myself that I am choosing to worry. Being worried is not something that is being imposed upon me by difficult circumstances. I am allowing my mind and heart to cling to my concerns and desires. I cannot stop a worried thought from arising in my mind. However, letting myself be absorbed in my worries is my choice. I always have a better choice, to let go of my worried thoughts and return my heart to stillness and acceptance. It would be easy if I could find peace by letting go of a worrying problem just once, but I generally need to let go of my worries again, and again, and again. The real solution is difficult and requires patience and willingness.

This letting go again and again is not a cold mechanical act of practice. Letting go requires my faith that everything in my life is an expression of the boundless heart of Buddha. Then I can bring my faith to illuminate the true nature of my problems so that I can free my heart and see and experience the unreal nature of my problems and my suffering.

When I realize each act of letting go is an act of faith, I find it easier to have compassion for the part of me that still doubts the Dharma. Defilements are still finding a home in my heart, which means I still burn with very real desires, fears and ill will. The peace of letting go and just being present and accepting is very hard because the result may appear to be just the absence of everything that we find meaningful. This is why the world is full of people who wonder why anyone would wish to look at a wall for hours. It is rare to meet the person who is pursuing peace rather than a life that is filled with seemingly meaningful activities and, hopefully, even some excitement.

Letting go is the heart of spiritual life, but spiritual life is difficult. This is because, while our life and even our dreams can seem to possess a living, burning reality, letting go can seem cold, empty and unreal. Yet what brings one to spiritual life, and then keeps one going, is the intuitive sense that within the stillness of our hearts, we can find our true and deepest longing. Spiritual life is the growing of this small flame of spiritual intuition until it illuminates our whole life and world with the light of Buddha.

Serene Reflection Meditation means we allow all thoughts and feelings to be seen and not suppressed. We do not allow any thought or feelings to control us. We try to allow everything that arises to simply reflect off our mind. Our mind is grounded, first in our faith, and then in our growing experience as we train, that everything we want, we have already within our hearts.

Often I have wanted peace but then pushed peace away by demanding that some aspect of my self or the world is unacceptable and must be different. I often see myself wishing that I was more willing, that I was not so filled with so many desires and fears, and that I did not hurt so much. I often want the world, other people, myself, to be different. I have, at times, found myself dreaming of being a better monk. I have dreamed of being deeply spiritual, dreamed of being wiser, dreamed of training with fierce determination. Yet, all the time I am looking elsewhere, the only place I can find peace and contentment is in the present moment, in

this very situation I find myself. Anything else means that I am abandoning reality to dream of a different past or an imaginary future. What I need to keep doing is to stop dreaming and stop asking for my life to be different. The Dharma is very simple, I just need to keep reminding myself to be at peace and content right now. When I stop grasping and asking for things to be different and I am willing to be still with an open heart, I sometimes find, to my amazement, that peace, joy and contentment are already flowing through me. The Dharma is pointing me to the Truth; that I already possess my deepest wish. What is needed is very simple but I find it hard as it goes against many deeply ingrained habits of my heart and mind. All I need to do is be willing to try again and again to be fully present and to try again and again to accept what I am being given in this present moment.

What we normally view as reality is really just life viewed through the distorting lenses of what we want and fear, and it can seem very depressing and hopeless. Often I see that I am allowing all my desires, passions and fears to fill me. Not surprisingly, I then find that my life becomes very confusing and dark, and my daily life seems to be out of touch with the teachings of the Dharma. Yet when we stop demanding and asking and look at life with a still and open heart, reality is always the life of Buddha.

My spiritual problem and most Buddhists' problem is how we try to qualify the Dharma and add a "but". I can be at peace but this has to change. I can be at peace but some difficulty first needs to go away. When I am suffering, I find it invaluable to ask myself what I am asking for. Then I need to compassionately remind myself that my suffering is the result of what I am asking for, that I should only be asking to open my heart to the Buddha. When frustration with some situation arises, I need to tell myself to let go, that it will be all right even if the worst thing happens. When I feel something is a problem, I need to tell myself that there is no problem. I may need to take action, but that is not a problem. I just need to be willing to respond to the needs of the present situation and do what seems to promote the most good and the least harm.

Instead of being upset or despairing about my restlessness, my frustration, and my fear, I need to treat all these difficult states of mind with loving firmness. I am causing myself to suffer if I let these feelings control my life. Meditation is learning to see and experience suffering or joy without feeling the need to react. Meditation helps me see the changeable nature of this endless flow of feelings that are always moving through me. I need to have compassion for my small self with its many difficult emotions. Often I experience a voice in me crying out how important this feeling is, how vital this desire is, how fearful and unacceptable this situation is. And what I need to do again and again, is to let go and allow each lost feeling of fear, of desire, of anger, to find peace in the stillness of my open heart. When I stop clinging and offer an unqualified yes to the unfolding of my life, peace is everywhere.

The great Theravadin Master, Ajahn Chah had a wonderfully succinct teaching on finding peace:

If you let go a little, you will have a little peace.

If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.

If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom.¹

Seeing all of life with deep wisdom is what liberates us. Yet the path to wisdom is viewing all of life through peaceful eyes. When our minds spin an endless stream of thoughts telling us what reality is, we will not see the Buddha. Peace, contentment, and wisdom are always living within us. We need to stop indulging our minds spinning their old, deluded tales and take refuge in the liberating Dharma where, in reality, there never was, is, or will be anything stopping us from letting go and finding peace and contentment.

¹ Ajahn Chah, A Still Forest Pond; compiled and edited by Jack Kornfield and Paul Breiter, (Wheaton, IL, Theosophical Publishing House, 1987) p.73.