

How to Cut Off Afflictions?

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Good morning teacher. Good morning everyone. Another weekend is here. In the cycle of birth and death, in the suffering karmic sea, there is always time. There is no beginning and no end of time. We always have time. If today we are not enlightened, there is always tomorrow. If in this life, we are not enlightened, there is always next life. However, accompanying time, it is affliction and suffering. If time never ends for you, then afflictions and sufferings never end for you.

Somebody might say, "I am happy and I don't have afflictions and sufferings in my life." "Lucky you", I would say. You are either enlightened or simply don't feel the pain inside or you may be too young and still don't understand what is affliction.

So, what is affliction? Affliction is a state of pain, distress, grief, misery, a cause of mental or bodily pain.

Affliction fills every day of our life. Babies cry every day. Even though we do not know the reason sometimes, but we do know that they are not comfortable. Which family is always peaceful? Which couple have no contradictions. Which child is always happy? Which person does not go through any bodily pain? No one can escape afflictions. Afflictions treat the poor and the rich equally. Afflictions treat the young and the old

equally. Afflictions treat men and women equally. Every living being has his/her own kinds of afflictions.

Our topic today is how to Cut Off Afflictions?

2600 years ago, when the Buddha saw that all living beings undergo four great sufferings—birth, aging, sickness, and death—he brought up resolve to leave the home life. He wanted to cultivate and find ways to liberate living beings from all these sufferings.

Without our knowing it, our afflictions manifest themselves. Sometimes they show in our appearance; sometimes they are hidden in our minds. Once ignorance is stirred up, we are totally lost. When ignorance plays its tricks on us, we become muddled. Afflictions are stumbling blocks to cultivating the Way.

On the other hand, we cannot really go without afflictions. Why? Because somehow “Affliction is Bodhi.” If you know how to use it, you will know what is Bodhi; if you don't know how to use it, then Bodhi becomes affliction. Bodhi is analogous to water, and affliction to ice. Ice and water are of the same substance; there is no difference. In freezing weather, water will freeze into ice, and in hot weather, ice will melt into water. When there are afflictions, water freezes into ice; and when the afflictions are gone, ice melts into water. This principle is very easy to understand. In other words, having afflictions is having the affliction-ice of ignorance; having no afflictions is having the Bodhi-water of wisdom.

Where do our afflictions come from? They come from the five poisons of greed, hatred, stupidity, pride and suspicion. If people didn't have these five poisons, there wouldn't be any illnesses. In the Buddha dharma, the six Paramitas, generosity, morality, endurance, diligence, meditation, and supreme wisdom are the antidote to greed, anger, stupidity, pride and suspicion. By cultivating the six Paramitas, the causes of afflictions will gradually be lessened.

When the water is clear,

The moon is reflected within it;

When idly thoughts are settled,

Wisdom will rise from them.

In this state, there are no afflictions. Like an old saying—

When the mind is still and thoughts are gone,

That is true wealth and honor.

When selfish desires are totally cut off,

That is the true field of blessings.

In short, to not be greedy is to be wealthy and honored. People are greedy because

they aren't content; they feel they don't have enough. Being without selfish desires is called a field of blessings. If the desires are totally cut off, that is the true field of blessings. You should pay special attention to this.

If your mind is at peace,

A hundred difficulties will be dispelled.

If your thoughts are settled,

All things will be auspicious.

OK, back to the affliction itself, what is affliction? Having an afflicted body and an annoyed mind. In this state, there is no self-mastery. What is worry? Distress and vexation, and being in low spirits. What are sudden misfortunes? Accidents and unfortunate events. These things bind you and oppress you, like the lock of ignorance which locks you up, like the rope of affliction which ties you up. They are also like a huge rock pinning you down and suffocating you, so that you cannot breathe. The Buddha wanted all living beings to part with afflictions and attain peace and happiness; to escape from all oppression and gain liberation, and this is why he taught all living beings to bring forth the great Bodhi mind, and to learn and cultivate the Buddha's meritorious, virtuous conduct. Therefore, we living beings should listen to, accept, believe, and practice the Buddha's teachings.

Living beings' afflictions are limitless and boundless. They are just like a mirage. The Bodhisattvas see how deluded living beings are: living beings reverse the straight and the crooked, black and white, good and evil. No matter how one tries to teach them, they just cannot change their habits. They have countless layers of obstacles. If you point out their faults, they'll get upset and try to justify them; they don't want to correct them and change for the better. They'll even display great ignorance and become terribly afflicted.

Why? Why they are so stubborn? The Bodhisattvas bring forth a kind, compassionate, and sympathetic mind for these living beings. Again and again, they remind living beings not to gossip or become afflicted, and tell them that if they don't lose their tempers or let jealousy obstruct them, they'll be able to leave the sea of suffering, why people just not willing to listen? Why they always complain that this is no good and that is wrong; this person made such and such mistakes, and that person has some other fault. Do you find some common features here? If affliction is a mirror, we are easily to catch the images of other people, not ourselves'.

Let's think about it. Everyone has his own afflictions. From the President to the panhandler, everyone has afflictions. The leaders of all the nations of the world worry about their nation one day, and their people the next. Many matters vex their minds. Panhandlers beg for food; if people don't give them food, they lose their tempers and get afflicted. If you want to be free of afflictions, the only way is to take out of your mirror, check yourself carefully, again and again, not other people. Observe your

afflictions and negative emotions and ask yourself 'why', are those things or people really annoying or just myself not humble enough, not wise and tolerant enough? Do I really believe and obey the karma? By asking yourself some question like this instead of blaming or accusing someone else, you will get the benefit soon. Just like a famous saying in our Buddhist, to diligently cultivate precepts, samadhi, and wisdom, and extinguish greed, hatred, and stupidity. When you become skilled at cultivation, your afflictions will naturally cease.

Bodhisattvas bring forth great compassion towards living beings who are afflicted with the five poisons. They vastly proclaim the cure for these sicknesses. The Buddha spoke 84,000 Dharma-doors to cure living beings' 84,000 illnesses of affliction. These 84,000 prescriptions can eradicate all living beings' sufferings. Of course, 84000 means innumerable and I believe that everyone here in this room have read sutras and mantras, the teaching from Buddha, which could guide you out of avijja and afflictions, but when you are stuck in affliction, have you tried to use Buddha's teaching to get through it? Or just like other people, you keep complaining and complaining?

If we be affected by our affliction, by analogy, like we get a headache or cold, think about it as a kind of disease. All Buddha's teaching could be our prescriptions. If we study the prescriptions without taking the medicine prescribed, it will be useless, right? So, what I am going to say is, take a small pill from all kinds of those pills you know. At least turn your mirror to your own face to look at yourself, maybe you will find that people are not that annoying and myself could be little bit stubborn. If you could

approach the ideas like these, you are on your way of cutting off your afflictions.

Remember, Bodhisattvas always look inside.

Today, I read a short story and I would like to share with you.

Somebody asked the Buddha, "What do you get out of cultivation?" The Buddha said, "Nothing." "Then why do you cultivate", the person asked. The Buddha smiled and said, "I can tell you what I lost. I lost anger; I lost anxieties; I lost worries; I lost selfishness; I lost greed, hatred and ignorance; I also lost all kinds of bad habits. At the same time, the fear of aging and death disappeared in front of me.

Is affliction a bad thing? In the universe, there is no good or bad. Good and bad are simply the discrimination of human beings. Just like without demons, there wouldn't be buddhas. Without going through afflictions, one will never achieve Bodhi. That is why people say, "Affliction is Bodhi."

Thank you for listening!