



Nancy, 01/23/2021

Root of Suffering

Hi everyone, this is Nancy. Today is Jan. 23rd. How are you doing? We often hear people say self, non-self, ego and non-ego. Today, I would like to share with you the contemplation of the Buddha so that we could understand these words better. These are simple words, however, they are the root of sentient beings' sufferings and wrong perceptions.

Prince Siddhartha abandoned his royal family to look for the Great Way and became the hermit Gautama. At the beginning, he followed different masters to practice. He could quickly reach the states that different masters guided him to, but the achievements, though very few could reach, could not satisfy him, which means that his sufferings, his fear, his anger were not able to be completely removed. He still felt jailed, suffocated, and not at ease deep inside.

Later, he gave up following the masters, and started to explore by himself. He spent several years practicing in the austere way. He tortured his body by eating very little; he tried to overcome his fear by meditating in deep forest. However, he found that he was not able to solve his mind problems by being strict with his body. So after years of trying, he walked onto the Middle way. He said, "There are two extremes that a person on the path should avoid. One is to plunge oneself into sensual pleasures, and the other is to practice austerities which deprive the body of its needs. Both of these extremes lead to failure."

In deep concentration, he found that the body, the feelings, the perceptions, the mental formation and consciousness were like five rivers flowing all the time, which means that the self, the "I", the ego that we normally think ourselves as are composed of these five rivers. Each cell of our body is like a drop of water in the endlessly flowing river. Each cell forms, lives and then dies. Old cells die and new cells form. Gautama saw that there was nothing in the body that was not changing, and there was not a separate self.

Intermingled with the river of the body is the river of the feelings, in which every feeling is also a drop of water. These feelings, like the cells in the body, also arise, live, and then disappear, one after another. Some feelings are pleasant, some are unpleasant, and some are neutral, but none of these feelings are permanent or independent.

Then, Gautama explored the river of perceptions, which exist together with the rivers of the body and feelings. Again, the perceptions intermingle and influence each other. They arise, live and disappear. If the perceptions are accurate, one sees the reality; if the perceptions are not accurate, one sees a false world. People suffer because of their erroneous perceptions of the world. They think the impermanent permanent, that which is without self contains a self, that which has no birth and death has birth and death, and they divide what is inseparable into parts.

Then, Gautama looked into the mental states, the sources of all sufferings, the fear, the anger, the hatred, the arrogance, jealousy, greed. He saw that all these negative mental states, are



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due to people's ignorance which is the opposite of mindfulness. They are the darkness or illness of the mind. He saw that the key to liberation would be to break through ignorance, shine light/wisdom on the darkness, to enter deeply into the heart of reality. At that time, Gautama knew that ignorance was the cause. If one is liberated from ignorance, one would be cured, and their mental obstructions would vanish on their own.

Gautama smiled and looked up at a Bodhi leaf. In the leaf, he saw the presence of the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain, the cloud, and actually he saw the whole universe in this one leaf. Though the leaf was born in the springtime, Gautama could see that the leaf had been there for a long long time in the sunlight, the clouds, the tree, and everything else. Both the leaf and himself had simply manifested, but in fact, they had never been born and were not capable of dying. With his insight, birth and death, appearance and disappearance, dissolved. One included all, and all were contained in one.

There isn't a separate, permanent self in everything, which is the empty nature of everything. Nothing can exist independently from the rest of the universe, which is the interdependent nature of all phenomena. Gautama realized that the key to liberation is the two principles: interdependence and non-self. The whole universe is ONE, and this is the reality. Entering into reality and accepting the reality will help us break through the ignorance and let the wisdom shine.

Amitabha! From one night to the other, Gautama meditated beneath the bodhi tree and shining the light of his awareness on his body, his mind, and all the universe until one day, he was seized by the feeling that he would attain the Great Awakening that very night. Thanks everyone for watching this video. I hope this talk also shone light on you. Let's keep exploring the truth of the universe and continue to break open the jail that shackles our mind. See you next time. Bye.