

I. [Intro]

- A. Tonight I'd like to offer the first of a series of talks about the Gradual Training,
 - 1. the interwoven phases of practice that gradually lead one
 - a) to a greater and greater ability to live with contentment,
 - (1) to live with an open heart,
 - (a) to live with greater and greater freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion.
- B. In this country we often begin with meditation,
 - 1. and perhaps with the idea that we only have to be mindful,
 - a) or mindful and concentrated,
 - (1) and we'll be able to live a better, happier life.
- C. Yet what we find in the Pāli discourses is
 - 1. that the Buddha repeatedly spoke of the path of development
 - a) that we need to follow
 - (1) as involving much more than this.
- D. And those of us who practice for any length of time
 - 1. begin to realize this for ourselves as well.

II. [Setting of the Elephant's Footprint Sutta]

- A. My primary source for this talk is
 - 1. "The Shorter Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint",
 - a) the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*, MN 27.¹
- B. I want to offer a little about the setting of the discourse
 - 1. and how the simile of the elephant's footprint fits into it,
 - a) before we actually get to the Buddha's teaching.
- C. The sutta begins with a man of the brahmin caste, Jāṇussoṇi,

1. meeting a wanderer by the name of Pilotika
 - a) on the road outside of the city of Sāvattthī.

D. Jāṇussoṇi asks Pilotika where he has been.

1. Pilotika replies that he has been in the presence of "the ascetic Gotama."
 - a) (Just as an aside,
 - (1)when we find someone describing the Buddha by his common name like this,
 - (a)it usually means that he was not one of the Buddha's followers.)

E. Jāṇussoṇi asks what Pilotika thinks of the Buddha.

1. Pilotika expresses great confidence in the Buddha's wisdom and
 - a) then compares the footprint of the Buddha's teaching,
 - (1)the scope, depth and effect of the Buddha's teaching,
 - (a)to be similar to the footprint of a big bull elephant.

F. Jāṇussoṇi is so impressed by this, he goes to seek out the Buddha himself.

G. When they meet he tells the Buddha the story of his encounter with Pilotika

1. and the simile of the big bull elephant's footprint.

H. The Buddha then replies that "**the simile of the elephant's footprint has not been completed in detail**"²,

1. and he offers a teaching on the gradual path to liberation.

III.[Developing Faith to Practice]

A. The very first step on the gradual path is:

1. "**A householder...On hearing the Dhamma ... acquires faith in the Tathāgata.**"³

- a) "Tathāgata" being the term the Buddha often used to refer to himself. It is sometimes translated as "suchness."⁴
- B. And then the Buddha describes that this householder goes forth as a bhikkhu, a male monastic follower of the Buddha,
1. though it could also have been a bhikkhuni a female monastic.
- C. I think the meaning of this for most of we lay people, though,
1. is that two things have to happen for us to start on the path.
 - a) We have to hear about the Dhamma - the teachings and practices.
 - b) And we have to have at least a little faith in the teachings and practices in order to even begin to explore this way of life.
- D. This may sound pretty simple,
1. but in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Connected Discourses,
 - a) the Buddha suggests that if you have a blind sea turtle
 - (1) that comes to the surface once every hundred years
 - b) and a plank of wood with a hole in it
 - (1) floating this way and that in the ocean,
 - c) the odds of a human being coming to practice the Dhamma are
 - d) similar to the chance
 - (1) that the turtle would put its head through the hole
 - (a) when it comes to the surface.⁵
- E. So the fact that we are here, engaged in this practice,
1. is pretty miraculous
 - a) by itself.
- F. So, Faith is one of the foundations that we must begin with.
1. It doesn't have to be a huge amount of faith,
 - a) but there does have to be a willingness to give the practice a try.
 2. And then as we do the practice,
 - a) we can verify for ourselves that the teachings are true and helpful,
 - (1) and our faith can grow stronger.

IV.[Ethical Living]

A. Having heard the Dhamma and developed some faith to practice it, the next thing that the Buddha describes is living ethically.

B. First, **"abandoning the destruction of life, he abstains from the destruction of life; with rod and weapon laid aside, conscientious, merciful, he dwells compassionate to all living beings."**⁶

1. So this is an expression of what has come to be called the first precept: not killing or non-harming.

2. Although the practice is to be compassionate towards all beings,

a) hearing about laying aside rod and weapon makes it clear that

(1) setting aside the inclination to kill another human

(a) was one of the major challenges of this training

(i) at the time the Buddha lived.

3. And, of course, the opposite of the inclination to harm is to cultivate the intention of goodwill, or in the Pāli, mettā.

C. Next, **"Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from taking what is not given; taking only what is given, expecting only what is given, by not stealing he dwells in purity."**⁷

1. And this is an expression of the second precept.

2. One thing I find interesting is the phrase "expecting only what is given."

a) This suggests to me that part of the practice is also training oneself to abandon coveting things

(1) and to train in not having any expectations of receiving.

b) So this goes beyond constraining behavior

(1) to training the mind and heart as well.

3. The corollary of this is, of course, cultivating the intention and the practice of generosity.

D. Next we find **"Abandoning sexual relations, he observes celibacy, living apart, refraining from the coarse practice of sexual intercourse."**⁸

1. The way this training is expressed it applies to monastics, or to people who are on retreat.
2. For lay people living the household life, the more usual expression of this third precept is
 - a) to refrain from sexual misconduct,
 - (1) or, more specifically, to refrain from sexual behaviors that are harmful to oneself or others,
 - (a) and to respect the commitments and boundaries of one's own and others' relationships.

E. Then the Buddha speaks of the bhikkhu **"Abandoning false speech, he abstains from false speech; he speaks truth, adheres to truth, is trustworthy and reliable, one who is no deceiver of the world.**

1. **"Abandoning malicious speech, he abstains from malicious speech; he does not repeat elsewhere what he has heard here in order to divide [those people] from these, nor does he repeat to these people what he has heard elsewhere in order to divide [these people] from those; thus he is one who reunites those who are divided, a promoter of friendships, who enjoys concord, rejoices in concord, delights in concord, a speaker of words that promote concord.**
 - a) **"Abandoning harsh speech, he abstains from harsh speech; he speaks such words as are gentle, pleasing to the ear, and loveable, as go to the heart, are courteous, desired by many and agreeable to many.**
 - (1) **"Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter; he speaks at the right time, speaks what is fact, speaks on what**

is good, speaks on the Dhamma and the Discipline; at the right time he speaks such words as are worth recording, reasonable, moderate, and beneficial."⁹

2. This is a pretty thorough development of the fourth precept.

- a) It is actually the most developed of these instructions, so far, and gives us a sense of how important, and difficult, the practice of Right Speech can be. An important thing to remember is that it is a training, not just a set of rules. {from the discussion}

F. Although it is mentioned other places in the Pāli suttas, the fifth precept is not included here in the continuing list of behaviors that the monastic would train in abandoning or avoiding.

1. So, just a reminder that this training is

- a) to refrain from the use of intoxicating drink and drugs that lead to heedlessness,¹⁰

(1) This does not mean abstaining from medications specifically prescribed for the treatment of a medical condition.

G. Training in these ways of living ethically have a number of benefits for us.

1. First it contributes to harmonious social relationships.

- a) People feel safe around one who lives this way.
b) And because they feel safe, the person who lives this way can also feel safe from outer harm.

2. Living with well developed ethics also allows us to trust our own intentions,

- a) to live without remorse,
(1) or regret for things we've done.
(2) In other words, it allows us to experience some safety from inner harm.

3. Living with well developed ethics contributes to a subtle kind of happiness and ease that arises from this sense of trust in our own motivations.

(1) And this happiness creates a foundation for the development of a calm and collected, or concentrated, mind,

(a) whether we are meditating or just living our daily lives.¹¹

H. So traditionally, practicing the teachings of the Buddha would begin with hearing the teachings, developing enough faith to begin and working with the ethical practices.

1. But, as I noted earlier, in this country we tend to jump over the step of ethics.

a) I've wondered how it is possible that we can just begin with meditation.

(1) It has seemed to me that most people who begin the practice with meditation

(a) probably already have a "good enough" level of virtue

(i) to be able to establish a beginning level of concentration and mindfulness.

(2) But as I reflected on my own experience,

(a) it seemed that as one attempts to go deeper on the path,

(i) one needs to increasingly refine one's ethics

(a) and the expression of those ethics in

(i) one's deeds, words and thoughts.

(3) So although faith and virtue are the first parts of the Gradual Training,

(a) our work with them must continue to deepen if

(i) we are to make progress

(a) in awakening to our own lives and

(i) awakening to the way that things are.

NOTES

1. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005, pp. 241-250
2. MN 27.9, p. 243.
3. MN 27.12, p. 244
4. Bhikkhu Bodhi indicates that the Buddha uses the term "tathāgata" when he is referring to himself as a fully awakened being, as a Buddha. He notes that the original meaning of the term is actually not understood, but that the term was also used by in other contemporary spiritual traditions to refer to the person who was fully accomplished in that tradition. He indicates that "suchness" is a concept from later Buddhism, especially Chinese Buddhism. The most relevant translations from Early Buddhism are "thus come" and "thus gone". "Thus come" meaning that he came to Buddhahood in the same way as previous Buddhas, so he "came thus." "Thus gone", he has gone to Nibbāna thus, just as all previous fully liberated beings had.— See: Bhikkhu Bodhi, Commentary on MN 27, part 2, 20:27-27:30, "Exploring the Word of the Buddha: A Systematic Study of the Majjhima Nikāya", Buddhist Association of the United States, 2008.
5. SN 56.48, Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008, p. 1872, same simile found at SN 56.47 & MN 129.24
6. MN 27.13, p. 245
7. MN 27.13, p. 245
8. MN 27.13, p. 245
9. MN 27.13, p. 245
10. See AN 8.46, 8.49 & 8.54 in Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012, as a few of the expressions of this.
11. Shaila Catherine, *Focused and Fearless*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2008, pp. 111-112