

Chapter 8

Wise Resolve

Discussion points

- Eightfold Noble Path - Wise resolve
- Role of citta in determining the nature of rūpa
- Various kinds of 'Wanting'

Wise view is the very first element of the eightfold noble path for freedom from unhappiness. The second element is *sammāsankappo*, usually translated as right intention, resolve or even thought. We shall prefer the translation: wise-resolve. The Buddha identifies three aspects of wise resolve, viz. *resolve to give up acquisitiveness, to give up ill-will and to give up harming others*. Let us understand these in detail.

In a materialistic culture prevalent today, with the paradigm of 'Yeh dil mange more.'⁵³ to talk of giving up acquisitiveness is not 'cool'. It is seen more as a quality of good ascetics and lazy householders. 'If I don't have enough wealth to buy villas with latest gadgets and furnishings in the metros where I have to go often for work; farm houses in country side and some resorts in mountains to spend vacations peacefully; a few chauffeur driven 'BMW's and SUVs, and a battery of servants in each residence, how will I be happy?' This seems to be the mindset of this generation. But as the famous philosopher Jacob Needleman points out, this is not really true, for happiness is not governed so much by our wealth as by the texture of our mind:

If you are worrying about vegetables now, you'll be worrying about yachts then. You're a worrier. It's in you, not the money. Life, except for the obvious physical needs, is not so much defined by the external situation as by the inner one.

⁵³ The tagline of a famous ad on Indian media; English translation: My heart yearns for more...

Having money won't change your internal makeup. If you're an anxious sonofabitch without money, you're going to be an anxious sonofabitch with a lot of money

Moreover, as we discussed at length in [Chapter 2](#), the sensory pleasures are transient and thus incapable of giving abiding happiness. Excessive indulgence also results in addiction. 'Wealth is like sea water', says Schopenhauer, 'the more we drink, thirstier we become'. This unquenchable thirst for wealth often leads to a skewed personality as the other aspects of life - which money cannot buy- like health, family, relationships etc., get neglected. In many cases it also leads to unethical behaviour, as has been seen in last few years with numerous financial wizards getting on the wrong side of the law, thus destroying their hard earned reputation, which no amount of money can retrieve.

We also need to appreciate that the problem is not with acquisitions, with having wealth, goods, power etc., but with the attitude of acquisitiveness. A householder should earn wealth righteously to meet his own and his family's needs, and also to support

Acquisitiveness

Many Sanyasi's used to send their disciples to King Janaka who was renowned to be completely free from acquisitiveness. One such young renunciant, who had stayed in his palace for many days, was shocked to see the opulence in which the King lived and wondered how he could learn 'renunciation' from him.

One evening, after he had finished his royal duties, the King took the young sanyasi with him for a walk. The King was calmly answering his queries on the way. They walked far away from the palace and reached a hillock. They sat there on the bench savouring the sunset. Suddenly the young sanyasi cried out: Fire. The sky was crimson red and the palace seemed to be engulfed in flames. The King gently remarked: May be, and continued the discussion they were having.

The sanyasi was perturbed and asked: Sir, are you not concerned, your palace is on fire? Your family lives there!

The King replied: You see, Sir, we are so far from the palace that even if we walk back, by the time we reach, the palace would have been reduced to ashes. Our ministers there should be doing their best so why worry?

The sanyasi was aghast at the 'irresponsible attitude' of the King and blurted out: Sir, you are rich ...but I am a poor sanyasi. So, I am running back to take out my three sets of clothes before they are reduced to ashes.

As he approached the palace, he noticed that it was just a minor fire which had occurred away from the palace and all his belongings were safe. He noticed the King walking back slowly and calmly and recalled what his Teacher had told him: You will learn the true meaning of 'renunciation' from the King.

others who need help. There is no problem in possessing things; the problem arises when things possess us.

The confusion between 'needs', which are always finite, and the 'wants' which are insatiable, is often the main cause of acquisitiveness. The material needs include the basic 'survival needs' (like food, clothing, shelter, health-care, security), and auxiliary needs

like education, transport, communication, entertainment, socialization, etc. Looked as needs, all of these are finite and can be satiated. But the attitude of acquisitiveness converts them into 'wants'. How many houses, clothes, food, cars, telephones ... does a family need? It can always be quantified, howsoever liberal be the standards. But once these needs convert into 'wants', there is no limit.

The pursuit of acquisitiveness also has damaging social and ecological consequences. With un-necessary accumulation of 'things' the tendency to ostentatious living increases which has damaging social impact. The glaring inequity in the society is one of the prime causes of crime and violence. Further, the increasing demand thus created is fueling the industrial activity with all its consequences on resource depletion and ecological degradation.

Thus to one who is pursuing the wise view, it becomes quickly clear that acquisitiveness is a source of unhappiness, not just for him, but for the whole society, and he naturally resolves to 'renounce' it, to give it up.

The resolve to give up ill-will and the wish to harm others (often in the garb of revenge) can also be seen as direct outcome of the wise view. How much we suffer when we harbour a grudge against somebody for an act done by him that has hurt or harmed us? The spoken words often hurt us, even when there was no intention on the part of the speaker to do so. Often this is due to just a difference of perceptions. Even if the hurt or harm is intentional, keeping a grudge only prolongs our unhappiness. Observing this unhappiness with the attitude of *yathābhūtaṃ nānadassanaṃ* reveals the futility of doing so. Rightly has it been said that holding on to grudge is like drinking poison in the hope that it will kill someone else.

The same is true of the wish to harm others, to take revenge, or settle scores. In the verses of the Elder Monks, One Enlightened monk puts it beautifully:

"First one kills [hurts] oneself; only thereafter does he kill [hurt] others".⁵⁴

Of course we are also bound to suffer further when the 'consequences' of that misdeed manifest.

The Buddha equates the wish to harm others with the foolish attempt to hurl burning charcoal at someone. As soon as we hold the burning charcoal in our hands to do so, it would burn us first.

⁵⁴ Theragāthā 139, Vasabhattheragāthā,

While wise resolve naturally follows from wise intention, leading life in accordance with it helps strengthen wise view. As we become less interested in accumulating things, it releases lot of energy and time for the practice of other elements of the noble eight fold path. Our resolve to desist from ill will and hurting others helps make our speech, actions and livelihood appropriate so that these do not become a source of unhappiness.

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