

Practical Value

From a practical point of view, the teachings touch on impermanence more than the other characteristics, because impermanence is more apparent. The state of pressure, stress and friction—*dukkhatā*—is moderately difficult to observe and is therefore referred to less. The characteristic of nonself is the most subtle and difficult to see, and is referred to the least. The more obvious sign of impermanence is used as a foundation to explain the characteristics of *dukkha* and nonself.

The following two verses of the Buddha show the value of the Three Characteristics for Dhamma practice:

Indeed, all conditioned things are impermanent, prone to arise and pass away. Having arisen, they cease; their coming to rest is truest bliss.¹

Monks, all conditioned things are of a nature to decay; strive to attain the goal by diligence.²

The first verse advocates a proper relationship to the world and to life in general: the value of thoroughly comprehending that all things are compounded, unstable, and subject to change; they cannot be commanded at will, they accord with causes, and they exist ‘just so.’ With this knowledge a person maintains an appropriate attitude towards life and clinging ceases. Despite alteration, decay and disappearance of cherished objects, the mind is not overwhelmed and disturbed; it remains clear, radiant and joyful on account of its innate wisdom. This verse emphasizes liberation of the heart—transcendence—which is the benefit of spiritual practice.

The second verse calls attention to virtuous conduct, which is conducive to the realization of the supreme state. [70/37] This realization stems from the knowledge that all things are ephemeral and subject to pressure. Flux is perpetual, timeless and inexorable. Human life especially is fleeting, uncertain and unreliable. Knowing this, one makes effort in that which should be done and refrains from that which should be avoided. One does not procrastinate or waste opportunities. One strives to rectify harmful situations, takes heed to protect oneself from further damage, and cultivates virtue by reflecting with wisdom, which accords with conditions. As a result, one fulfils one’s responsibilities and attains one’s goals. This verse emphasizes diligence and careful attention, which are mundane and practical qualities. These qualities are the benefit of proper action.

¹ D. II. 199; S. II. 193; spoken by others at D. II. 157; S. I. 6, 158; Ap. 385. This verse is known as ‘the maxim of the arahants’ (S. I. 6). The ‘coming to rest’ and equally the ‘bliss’ refers to Nibbāna. The verse is commonly chanted at funerals: *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā...*

² Alternative second clause: *bring heedfulness to perfection*. This verse is the Buddha’s final utterance and is considered to be of great import. It is found at D. II. 120, 156; S. I. 157-8; Venerables Revata and Sāriputta spoke similar verses at Thag. 67, 91.

One should apply this second, engaged course of action to all levels of human affairs, from personal to social issues, from secular matters to the supreme, and from earning a living to seeking the enlightened truth of the Buddha. The following teachings of the Buddha highlight this quality:

*Monks, considering personal well-being, you should accomplish it with care. Considering others' well-being, you should accomplish it with care. Considering the well-being of both, you should accomplish it with care.*³

*There is one quality, Great King, which secures dual welfare, both present (visible) welfare, and future (subtle) welfare.... This quality is heedfulness (appamāda).... A wise person who is heedful secures dual welfare, both present and future. The steadfast one, by securing (these two) benefits, is called a sage.*⁴

*Monks, a person of good moral conduct, perfect in moral conduct, through careful attention to his affairs, gains much wealth.*⁵

*By earnest endeavour (appamāda), monks, I attained enlightenment. [70/38] And you too, monks, if you put forth undeterred effort ... in no long time you shall realize the goal of the holy life by way of superior wisdom in this very life.*⁶

The two benefits, from spiritual practice and from proper action, are mutually supportive. By their consummation through right training a person obtains supreme well-being.

1. The Spiritual Practice Leading to Liberation

Spiritual benefit, and the practice for its fulfilment, relates directly to the highest goal of Buddha-Dhamma. It is of utmost importance, concerning the entire spectrum of Buddhist teachings. Because many details of its development require special understanding, the texts refer to it frequently and at length. Some texts, for example the Visuddhimagga, outline this development as an ordered system. Rather than describe specifics here, I will only offer a broad summary.

Those people who discern the three characteristics grow in wisdom and acquire a clearer understanding of life. In addition, they normally undergo two important transformative mental stages:

³ S. II. 29; A. IV. 134-5.

⁴ S. I. 86-87; and see S. I. 89; A. III. 48-49; It. 16-17.

⁵ A. III. 253; and see D. II. 86; D. III. 236; Ud. 87; in addition, see the beginning (not quoted) of the passage cited in the previous footnote.

⁶ A. I. 50.

Stage 1: Once a person understands conditionality more clearly, and has gained an intermediate insight into impermanence, *dukkha* and nonself, a reaction occurs. A feeling arises unlike any feeling previously experienced. Whereas formerly the person was captivated and delighted by sense objects, having now discerned the three characteristics sentiment changes into discontentment and aversion, and sometimes into disgust. At this stage emotions are predominant over wisdom. Despite the deficiency of wisdom and the remainder of mental bias, this stage is nonetheless important and occasionally even crucial for escaping from the power of attachment and for attaining the perfection in stage 2. Conversely, by stopping at this point a person's prejudice can be harmful.

Stage 2: At this stage a person has cultivated a thorough understanding of reality: wisdom has entered the stage of completion. All feelings of repulsion disappear, replaced by a feeling of equanimity. There exists neither infatuation nor disgust, neither attachment nor aversion. There remains only a lucid understanding of things as they truly are, in addition to a feeling of spaciousness. A person is able to act appropriately and judiciously. This level of mental development, included in the practice of insight meditation (*vipassanā*), is called 'equanimous knowledge of formations' (*sañkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). [70/39] It is a necessary stage of direct realization of truth and of the complete freedom of the heart.

There are two important fruits of liberation, especially when liberation is complete (in stage 2):

Freedom from suffering: Liberated individuals are relieved of all oppression that results from clinging. Happiness exists independent of alluring material objects. The mind is unrestricted, joyous, fearless and sorrowless. It is not stricken by the vacillations of worldly conditions (*lokadhamma*).* This feature affects ethics as well since these people do not create problems by venting unhappiness on others, which is a significant cause for social conflict. They develop virtues, notably loving-kindness and compassion, which act for the welfare of all.

*The eight 'worldly winds': Gain and loss, praise and blame, happiness and suffering, fame and obscurity.

Absence of defilement: Liberated persons are free from the power of defilements, for example greed, anger, covetousness, prejudice, confusion, jealousy and conceit. Their minds are clear, unfettered, calm and pure. This feature has direct influence on behaviour, both individual and social. Personally, they apply wisdom in an unadulterated way; they are not biased, for example, by aversion or selfish ambition. Externally, they do not commit offences prompted by the defilements. They perform wholesome actions

righteously and without hesitation since no defilements like laziness or self-centredness impede and disturb.

Nevertheless, when still not fully developed and existing in isolation (i.e, not supported by the practice of heedfulness), spiritual practice can still be harmful since the good can be a cause for unskilfulness.⁷ Having attained some spiritual gain and found peace and happiness, people are likely to revel in this happiness. They are likely to rest on their laurels, abandon effort, or neglect unfinished responsibilities. In short, they fall into heedlessness, as confirmed by the Buddha's words:

And how, Nandiya, is a noble disciple one who dwells negligently? Here, Nandiya, a noble disciple possesses firm confidence in the Buddha ... the Dhamma ... and the Saṅgha.... He possesses the virtues dear to the Noble Ones.... Content with this firm confidence ... with these virtues, he does not make further effort.... In this way, Nandiya, a noble disciple dwells negligently.⁸

The way to avoid such harm is to integrate the second practice. [70/40]

2. The Practice of Heedfulness

People generally follow two tendencies while conducting their affairs. When oppressed by suffering or in crisis, people hasten to amend the situation. Sometimes they are able to solve the problem, while at other times they cannot and must face loss or ruin. Even if they succeed, they experience much distress and struggle to find a lasting solution; they may even find defeat amidst their success: 'Win the battle but lose the war.' While at ease in everyday life, having attended to immediate concerns, people become complacent, allowing the days to pass by searching for pleasure or indulging in gratification. They do not occupy themselves with avoiding future harm. Unless cornered, they postpone their responsibilities. Assaulted by affliction or danger, they hasten to find relief; having escaped, they are content to partake in their delights. This cycle continues until one day they are powerless to alter the course of events or are destroyed in their attempt to escape.

The conduct described above is *pamāda*, which can be variously translated as negligence, heedlessness, laxness, disregard, lack of effort, and lethargy. It tends to go hand in hand with laziness.

The opposite quality is diligence (*appamāda*),* which is roused and guided by mindfulness. Diligent persons are continually aware of what must be avoided and what must be pursued, and commit themselves to these tasks. They recognize the importance of time, of work, and of the slightest responsibility. They are not

⁷ *Kusalo dhammo akusalassa dhammassa ārammaṇapaccayena paccayo* (Paṭ. 154); *adhipatipaccena* (Paṭ. 158); *upanissayapaccena* (Paṭ. 166).

⁸ S. V. 398.

intoxicated or overly enthralled by life. They make every effort to avoid transgression and miss no opportunity to grow in virtue. They hasten towards their goal or towards the good without interruption, and take great care in their preparations. [70/41]

*Other common translations include: Heedfulness, earnestness, perseverance, carefulness and vigilance.

An understanding of the Three Characteristics directly promotes diligence, because when one knows that all things are impermanent, unstable, fleeting, non-compliant, and subject to causes, then only one way of practice remains, which is to act in conformity with causes and conditions. This means that one makes effort to protect oneself from unwholesome influences, to repair damage, to preserve beneficial qualities, and to act meritoriously for further progress. This practice involves investigating causality and acting accordingly. For example, aware that all things are subject to change, one strives to act in such a way that desired salutary conditions exist as long as possible, and that they give the maximum benefit to others.

Upon closer examination, one sees that the real cause for or force behind this diligence is suffering. People's relationship to suffering, however, affects their reaction to it, resulting in either heedlessness or care. And even careful responses vary in quality. An analysis of this dynamic will show the value of *appamāda*. There are three ways to respond to suffering:

1. *Conduct Based on Stress of Suffering:* Some people indulge in comfort and pleasure, neglect their responsibilities, do not consider potential danger, but rather wait until danger confronts them. Faced with trouble and necessity, they hasten to remedy the situation, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.
2. *Conduct Based on Fear of Suffering:* Some people fear suffering and difficulty, and so strive to prevent hardship. Although their attempts to establish more security are usually successful, their minds are burdened by anxiety. Besides fearing suffering, they suffer from fear, and they act prompted by this secondary source of distress.
3. *Conduct Based on Knowledge of Suffering:* Some people reflect with wisdom on how to manage with potential suffering. They are not intimidated by fear since they understand the nature of the three characteristics; they recognize potential danger. They investigate the dynamics of change, relying on the awareness of impermanence and the liberty and flexibility afforded by the characteristic of nonself, to choose the best way forward. [70/42] In addition, they use past experience as a lesson to prevent suffering and to steer towards the greatest possible good. They are relieved of as

much suffering as is in their power, to the point of being free from all mental suffering and anxiety.

The first type of behaviour is heedless; types two and three are performed with care, but type two is a caution fed by defilement and thus bound up with suffering. Type three, on the other hand, springs from wisdom, and is therefore trouble-free: no mental suffering arises. This is full and proper heedfulness, which only an arahant practises perfectly. The quality of vigilance for unenlightened persons depends on their ability to apply wisdom (in line with type three), and on the reduction of stress caused by fear and anxiety (of type two).

As described above, ordinary people are not the only ones susceptible to heedlessness; persons in the initial stages of enlightenment can be careless as well. The reason for this carelessness is contentment, satisfaction, or complacency concerning exceptional qualities that they have attained. They delight in happiness and ease, and abandon their spiritual work. Another reason is that they have perceived the three characteristics; they have a profound understanding of change, they are reconciled to conditionality, and they are not troubled by decay and separation. Because of this ease and reconciliation, they stop; they show no further interest and make no effort to deal with unresolved issues. They neglect the necessary tasks for prevention or improvement, allowing problems to simply remain or even worsen. In this case, the attainment of spiritual benefit, or of (initial) liberation, is the grounds for carelessness. These individuals act incorrectly; their practice is one-sided and incomplete, lacking the effort required to achieve the full value of heedfulness. To rectify this situation, they must be aware of both benefits, the spiritual and the heedful, and bring them to completion.

One cause for heedless behaviour is attaching to non-attachment. Thorough knowledge of things based on an understanding of the three characteristics loosens or releases clinging to things. This non-clinging is at the heart of liberation and freedom from suffering, leading to the ultimate goal of Buddhism. In proper practice letting go occurs by itself; it is a consequence of clearly seeing things according to the truth of the Three Characteristics. Some people, however, do not yet have this lucid discernment; they have simply heard about this truth and rationalize about it. [70/43] Furthermore, they hold on to the idea that by grasping nothing whatsoever they will be released from suffering. Thinking in this way, they try to prove to themselves and others that they do not attach to anything, or are free of defilement, to the extent of taking nothing seriously.⁹ The result is functional imbalance, inattentiveness and negligence. This is attachment to non-attachment: it is a counterfeit non-attachment.

⁹ Not desiring anything is good, but one must be very careful of indifference. Acting without wishing for personal reward is praiseworthy as it demonstrates that one is not controlled by craving; but indifference can easily turn into neglect. Neglect is equivalent to heedlessness, misjudgement, and craving, which leads a person to indulge in ease and comfort. At the very least indifference indicates a lack of wholesome enthusiasm (*kusala-chanda*), which is the first step to all virtue.

Comparing activities prompted by different motivations will help to explain the activity prompted by heedfulness. Compare the four kinds of activity and inactivity:

1. Some people do not act if they receive no personal advantage or if they will lose an advantage. They act to gain or to protect an advantage.
2. Some people do not act because they attach to non-attachment: they abstain from acting to show that they are free of defilement.
3. Some people do not act as a result of carelessness, delighting in contentment and ease. Unafflicted by suffering, or resigned to conditionality, they are complacent.
4. Some people act or refrain from acting dependent on wise consideration of the circumstances. Knowing that something should be done, they act even if they gain no advantage. Knowing that something should not be done, they refrain even if by acting they would gain an advantage. When action is called for, they act immediately, without hesitation or delay.

The fourth kind is proper action performed with pure mindfulness and wisdom.

The Buddha's guidelines for heedful action are twofold, concerning both internal and external activities. The former are the exhortations to spiritual development, to make effort towards higher states of consciousness, which is equal to attaining the spiritual benefit from the Three Characteristics or the liberation of the heart. In brief, this activity is 'personal improvement.' The latter are the teachings for daily life and interaction with the world: the urging for diligence in work, the fulfilment of responsibilities, the solution and prevention of problems, the development of virtue, and the fostering of social well-being. In brief, this is 'social improvement.' [70/44]

The teachings of heedfulness encourage contemplation on three periods of time: The past, in order to draw lessons from past events and experiences, and to use these lessons as incentives for further effort; the present, for greater urgency in one's activities, for not postponing, and for making the most of each moment; and the future, to reflect on potential change, both beneficial and destructive, by using wisdom to examine causality, followed by plans to prevent harm and advance the good.

Compared with the Buddha's spiritual teachings, the practical teachings are fewer and of less detail; they are found scattered throughout the scriptures and tend to be concise. The reason for this is that human activities vary greatly according to time and place; they cannot be described with any uniformity. Therefore, the Buddha merely presented principles or examples. In contrast, the

transformation of the heart pertains to all human beings: the nature of the human mind is identical for all. Furthermore, this transformation is profound and difficult to realize, and is the unique aspect of the Buddha's teaching. He thus explained it thoroughly.

3. Correlation Between the Practice of Liberation and the Practice of Heedfulness

The spiritual practice for liberation supports the practice of heedfulness by promoting a purity of action. Liberated persons act with a pure heart, not driven by defilement. The practice for liberation also fosters a sense of joy in a person's activities. It releases people from the stress, agitation and worry that results from action stemming from unwholesome mind states, for example action done out of fear or competitiveness. Instead, people act with serenity and joy. [70/45] In addition, when people see the value of deliverance and mental well-being, they perform external activities to promote a just and peaceful life. In brief, material progress goes hand in hand with spiritual development.

Heedfulness similarly complements the practice for liberation. Generally, when people are at ease they become heedless, by becoming idle and slack in their effort. People who profit materially or who solve external problems are not the only ones who become careless when they are prosperous and comfortable. Those who have reconciled themselves to impermanence, *dukkha* and nonself, whose hearts are at ease, also tend to become attached to happiness and cease making effort. They no longer attend to unresolved matters, and do not urge themselves to improve either personal or social circumstances. The active value of the Three Characteristics based on heedfulness prevents this stagnation and motivates these individuals to persevere.

In short, these two practices must be united for Dhamma practice to be correct. Spiritual progress then inspires virtuous and joyful action, while people's deeds nurture further spiritual development. Proper practice is free from acting with a troubled mind and free from complacency. People act with ease and this ease does not become an obstacle for subsequent effort. Spiritual realization then safeguards action and action enhances spiritual realization. In unison, perfection is reached.

Spiritual and active, heedful qualities both depend on wisdom, which discerns the three characteristics, leads to non-attachment, surrender, relinquishment and liberation. The deeper the understanding, the greater is the freedom and higher the realization. For example, by accessing *jhāna** or gaining an insight, a person is able to perceive the impermanence, *dukkha*, and nonself in the bliss of these conditions, and they neither cling to the bliss nor to the attainments.

*Meditative absorption.

In practical affairs, wisdom rouses people to act with diligence and to make the most of each opportunity. An understanding of the law of causality prompts a person to investigate causes to solve problems at their root and to act in harmony with this law. This knowledge includes analyzing causes of past events so that one learns from them, and recognizing the necessary conditions for preventing harm and promoting well-being.

The two ways of practice reveal the supreme importance of the teaching on the Three Characteristics. The first way of practice highlights wisdom, which penetrates reality by comprehending the Three Characteristics [70/46]. The second way of practice points to diligent action, which springs from an understanding of the Three Characteristics. Wisdom's task is to realize the truth of the Three Characteristics; with this realization the heart is freed. At the same time, the Three Characteristics motivate a person who has some level of insight to take heed, to make further effort, and to avoid transgression.

An understanding of the Three Characteristics is the source of just action, from beginning stages of Dhamma practice to the end. Awareness of the Three Characteristics is the motivation for heedfulness, ingenuity, abstention from evil, and good conduct on all levels. Ultimately, a complete understanding of the Three Characteristics enables perfect mental freedom, which is the highest human achievement.

The worldly and the transcendent converge at the Three Characteristics. Liberation of the heart is a transcendent quality; heedfulness is mundane. The mutually supportive nature of these two principles demonstrates that in an honourable life the worldly and the transcendent abide in unison. One sees the evidence of this clearly in the Buddha and the arahants. Perfectly free they represent the human ideal and they attain this freedom by way of heedfulness. Arahants alone are described as 'those who have perfected heedfulness';¹⁰ they are persons who have finished their business by way of careful attention. Having attained arahantship they continue to persevere for the welfare of the monastic community (*saṅgha*) and of all beings. One should follow the example of these awakened ones, by realizing mental freedom and acting with care.¹¹

The values disclosed by the Three Characteristics ensure perfect moral conduct, with definite consequences. There are two things which guarantee infallible moral conduct: [70/47]

¹⁰ The Buddha sometimes characterized an arahant as 'incapable of negligence' (M. II. 478; S. IV. 125). He explained that arahants have completed all tasks that must be accomplished through diligence.

¹¹ The Abhidhamma states that arahants, those who have attained the ultimate transcendent state, act with 'an eminent operative mind' (*mahākiriya-citta*), which is mundane and belongs to the sense sphere.

1. *A desireless mind*, which does not experience clinging, craving, lust for material objects, or perverse thoughts; freedom from defilement; an end of selfishness.
2. *Sublime happiness*, which is independent of materiality and is accessible without moral infringement.

Indeed the first quality is enough to guarantee moral impeccability. The second is merely additional confirmation.

Liberation grants these two moral guarantees. A thorough understanding of the world and an insight into the Three Characteristics leads to freedom of the heart. Coveting and loathing, both grounds for wrongdoing, cease. In other words, moral conduct arises automatically since no impulse exists to act immorally. Furthermore, liberation generates a profound happiness. Awakened beings experience expansiveness and joy and some of them experience exalted states of bliss in *jhāna*.¹² Experiencing such bliss, it is natural that they are of no mind to act dishonourably for another sort of happiness. In any case, one must understand that the second guarantee of refined happiness alone is not yet fully dependable if it is a mundane form of happiness, for example that of *jhāna*, since a person who accesses these mundane states can still revert to indulgence in gross forms of happiness. To be truly secure, a person must obtain the first guarantee of non-craving; otherwise, the happiness must be transcendent, which automatically arises with the first guarantee.

Stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*) possess these two moral guarantees; they are impeccable in moral conduct and are incapable of moral transgression. The scriptures refer to enlightened beings (*ariya-puggala*), from stream-enterers upwards, as ‘perfect in moral conduct.’¹³ Therefore, if we wish for ethical standards to be firmly established in society, we must promote the realization of stream-entry; we will thereby meet with true success.

If one is unable to establish these two guarantees, one’s chances for a secure ethical society will be slim, because members of the society will be infected by defilement and thus be predisposed to violate boundaries. In this event, systems of control and coercion need to be created, or even excessive force be applied, which does not offer true safety or resolution. [70/48] We see the lack of success of such measures everywhere. For example, people in this day and age receive advanced education, and have learned what is good and bad, what is beneficial and harmful. But because they fall prey to greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), they act immorally; they injure themselves (for example, by intoxication) and damage

¹² In contrast, being confronted with the three characteristics but not truly understanding them is a cause for suffering (e.g., S. III. 3, 16, 42-43).

¹³ E.g., A. IV. 380-81; Pug. 37.

society (for example, by deforestation). Reasoned arguments and law enforcement end up having minimal effect.

When people are unable to establish the two aforementioned guarantees, they generally use the following methods to protect or promote ethical standards, with varying degrees of success:

- Intimidation by establishing rules, laws and punishments. Due to evasion of these laws, new systems must be created for reinforcement. In addition, the system itself may be flawed, for example with corruption. As a result, the attempts to maintain ethical standards meet with ever diminishing success.
- Intimidation with threats of occult power, for example of gods and supernatural forces. This is successful during times when people believe in these forces, but is less effective when people have the sort of scientific understanding present today. This form of intimidation includes instilling the fear of going to hell.
- Intimidation with threats against a person's honour and popularity, for example applying social pressure of blame and disrepute. This works for some but not for others, and is indecisive at best.
- Catering to desire by using a reward or compensation, either from people, gods, or occult powers, including the promise of heaven. This method is variously effective, according to time and place, and its results are uncertain.
- An appeal to virtue and righteousness, by encouraging a sense of shame, self-respect and mindfulness. Few people possess these qualities in strength; people usually submit to desire and therefore their moral conduct is inconsistent. The protection bestowed by this motivation is especially weak in an age abounding in temptation and base values.
- An appeal to faith, by fixing the mind with strong conviction on an ideal. This is difficult to accomplish, and even when successful it is unreliable, because faith is dependent on something external. Faith is not direct knowledge and sole reliance on faith is still tainted by defilement. Occasionally, this defilement intensifies and then enshrouds faith, or faith wanes and disappears on its own. (This method includes the concentrative power in preliminary stages of mind deliverance — *cetovimutti*.)
- Applying the power of enthusiasm (*chanda*), by encouraging an interest in the development of virtue. [70/49] This force is the adversary of

craving, which is the agent behind immoral behaviour. If one cannot yet cultivate the heart's liberation, one should emphasize the rousing of such enthusiasm, as it is a wholesome force, is conjoined with wisdom, and supports liberation more directly than any of the other methods mentioned above.

Regardless of which impetus one uses, Dhamma practice must rely on self-restraint (*saññama*) to achieve moral rectitude. Therefore, to foster ethical conduct people should be trained in strict self-discipline. The quality of success depends also upon the impetus. Of all the motivations listed above, the summoning of virtuous qualities, faith, and enthusiasm are best, but one must remember that these forces are unable to provide definite results. A truly stable ethical society only exists when people establish the two moral guarantees: A free heart and sublime happiness, which generate moral integrity automatically.

One can use heedfulness as a measuring stick for Dhamma practice by comparing oneself to the arahants, who combine consummate liberation with perfect diligence. They integrate knowledge of the truth with pure conduct, non-attachment with earnest effort, and transcendent realization with responsible action in the world. They reveal how two apparently discordant elements can exist in harmony and be mutually supportive. Heedfulness is the core of all righteous conduct and is the incentive behind all virtuous acts from beginning to end. As the Buddha said, heedfulness is like an elephant's footprint, which covers the footprints of all other animals; it dictates the function of all other virtues. All virtues depend on heedfulness; regardless of all the virtues described in the scriptures, carelessness alone suppresses and invalidates them as if they did not exist. Virtues are truly effective when heedfulness is established. For ordinary people, however, diligence tends to be weakened or interrupted due to their preoccupation with alluring sense objects. Craving causes laziness, worry and procrastination. People's conduct is thus continually wanting or fruitless. Conversely, the greater the heart's liberation, the less a person indulges in delusory sense objects, and the more assiduous that person is, unimpaired by defilement. [70/50] Freedom and earnest effort support one another in this way.

In addition, the principle of heedfulness is a reminder that all persons, including noble ones (*ariya*) in initial stages of awakening, are still vulnerable as long as they have not realized arahantship. They may become heedless by grasping the ease and contentment stemming from their attainments: their virtues induce them to err. Therefore, we must constantly remind ourselves to take care, and to promote a sense of urgency (*samvega*).

In any community there are people who succumb to heedlessness. Offering friendship and encouraging others to be prudent is one duty of a diligent person. The presence of a 'beautiful friend' (*kalyāna-mitta*) is a key factor which is paired with caution as an antidote when all other virtues are defunct during a period of

foolhardiness, and as an answer to the question: Having been careless, what are the alternatives to simply waiting to incur the painful consequences?

To sum up, people should take care and make earnest effort for their own and other's benefit and development. For example:

- Leaders of a country should make effort to establish peace and welfare, promote a healthy just environment, and nurture people's spiritual qualities.
- Religious elders should propagate the Dhamma for the welfare of the many, act in consideration of later generations, and do everything in their ability to preserve the true teaching (*saddhamma*) for all beings everywhere.
- Monks should perform their duties and inspire people with care; they should create a feeling of peace and safety by not undertaking practices of self-mortification, and by teaching the way to a virtuous life.
- All persons should strive for personal well-being by developing self-reliance, and for others' well-being by helping them gain self-reliance. One should cultivate wisdom to reach the highest benefit, which leads to deliverance and a life of integrity. [70/51]

Because human beings who are momentarily untroubled, live in comfort, or have reconciled themselves to an aspect of the truth ordinarily become careless, skilled teachers customarily offer friendly admonishment. They constantly seek means to encourage their followers by advising, inspiring and even frustrating, to establish people in heedfulness.

4. The Value of Liberation

Although the value of liberation is a component of the spiritual path it has several distinctive features. The scriptures define the spiritual path and its companion practical teachings by referring to impermanence, since impermanence is easily noticed. Even beginning Dhamma practitioners benefit from the Three Characteristics by integrating the spiritual and practical teachings, as befits their

level of understanding. The value of liberation, however, accompanies the meditation on nonself (*anattā*).¹⁴

*A person sees any kind of material form ... feeling ... perception ... volitional formations ... and consciousness, whether past, present or future ... as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' When a person knows and sees in this way, there exists no 'I'-making (ahaṅkāra), 'my'-making (mamaṅkāra), or underlying tendency to conceit (mānānusaya) regarding this body with its consciousness and all external signs.*¹⁵

The defilements of *ahaṅkāra*, *mamaṅkāra* and *mānānusaya* are also called *diṭṭhi*, *taṇhā* and *māna* respectively. As a group they are usually arranged as *taṇhā*, *māna* and *diṭṭhi*. This quote's significance is that a person who clearly sees the nature of nonself eliminates the three defilements that are tied up in a sense of self or that create egocentricity, namely:

Taṇhā: Selfishness; the search for self-gratification and personal gain.

Māna: Conceit, pride and self-judgement; the desire for prominence and control over others; the pursuit of power.

Diṭṭhi: Attachment to personal opinions; rigid conviction, credulity, and infatuation concerning theories, creeds and ideals.

These three defilements are collectively called *papañca* or *papañca-dhamma*, which can be translated as 'encumbrances.' [70/52] Another translation is 'agitators': *papañca* produce mental proliferation and turmoil. They cause mental disquiet, excess, delay and confusion. They lead a person to deviate from simple obvious truth. They breed new problems and interfere in the reasoned solution to existent problems; instead, they generate more complication and disorder. They dictate human behaviour, inducing unrest, disagreement, conquest and war. Such vices are not the only fruits; even if a person acts virtuously, a hidden catch hampers behaviour when these defilements act as the catalyst, leading people astray.

Depending on the extent of wisdom, an understanding of the Three Characteristics, especially the quality of selflessness, weakens or destroys these

¹⁴ The results of inquiries into impermanence, *dukkha*, and selflessness are linked, so examining each of the three characteristics aids in liberation. The chief determining factor for liberation, however, is the understanding of nonself, as confirmed by the Buddha's teaching: *The perception of impermanence should be cultivated for the removal of the conceit 'I am' (asmimāna). For when one perceives impermanence, Meghiya, the perception of nonself is established. A person who perceives nonself (in all things) accomplishes the eradication of the conceit 'I am,' and (realizes) Nibbāna (Ud. 37; and see A. IV. 353, 358).*

¹⁵ M. III. 18-19.

self-obsessed defilements. Once these disturbing, confining, and misleading agents are absent, the path to virtuous conduct is wide open and limitless. A person can then wholeheartedly cultivate virtues, for example goodwill, compassion, benefaction (*atthacariyā*), and generosity.