

[“An Auspicious Day” Sutta](#)

This article is an introductory summary of the teachings of Zen Master Thích Thông Triệt on the topic, mainly based on the oral teaching of Bhikkhuni Zen Master Thích Nữ Triệt Như given for the Fundamental Meditation Course. For a comprehensive in-depth understanding, the reader is encouraged to attend the complete nine-seminar teaching program and read the writings of Master Thích Thông Triệt that are being progressively translated into English.

“An Auspicious Day” is a short sutta, titled Bhaddekaratta Sutta, sutta number 131 of the Majjhima Nikāya or “collection of middle-length discourses” of the Buddha.

1. Summary

In this stirring sutta, the Buddha teaches us not to cling to the past, present and future and to take refuge in the here and now. The Buddha also urges us to start practicing from the present moment and practice assiduously, relentlessly, day and night in order to dwell in the state of peace and silence.

2. Introduction

The original Pāli name of the sutta is Bhaddekaratta Sutta. This Pāli word is composed of “*bhadda*”, which means “fortunate” or “auspicious”, “*eka*” which means “one”, and “*ratta*”. The translation of the word “*ratta*” has sparked some controversy. Modern Pāli translators usually render it as “*night*”, however, many translators of the Buddhist sutta have balked at this rendering on the ground that “*an auspicious one night*” made no sense; they have chosen “*an auspicious attachment*” instead. Bhikkhu Thanissaro, whose translation we adopt here, chose “An Auspicious Day” as the translation for the title of the sutta.

3. The sutta verses

The Buddha begins the sutta with these verses:

*One would not chase after the past,
Nor place expectations on the future.
What is past is left behind.
The future is as yet unreached.
Whatever quality is present
One clearly sees right there,
Unvanquished, unshaken,
That’s how one develops the mind.*

*Ardently doing one’s duty today,
For — who knows? — tomorrow death may come.
There is no bargaining with Death and his mighty horde.*

*Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly
Both day and night,
Has truly had an auspicious day:
So says the Peaceful Sage.*

4. The past, future and present

*One would not chase after the past,
Nor place expectations on the future.
What is past is left behind.
The future is as yet unreached.*

In the sutta, the Buddha further explains “not chasing after the past” and “not placing expectation on the future”.

And how, Monks, does one chase after the past? One gets carried away with the delight of ‘In the past I had such a form (...feelings and sensations... perception ... mental formations ... consciousness).’ This is called chasing after the past. And how does one place expectations on the future? One gets carried away with the delight of ‘In the future I might have such a form (... feelings and sensations ... perception... mental formations ...consciousness).’ This is called placing expectations on the future.

The Buddha goes on:

And how is one vanquished with regard to present qualities? There is the case where an uninstructed run-of-the-mill person who has not seen the noble ones, is not versed in the teachings of the noble ones, is not trained in the teachings of the noble ones, sees form (...feelings and sensations... perception ... mental formations ... consciousness) as self, or self as possessing form (...feelings and sensations... perception ... mental formations ... consciousness), or form (...feelings and sensations... perception ... mental formations ... consciousness) as in self, or self as in form (...feelings and sensations... perception ... mental formations ... consciousness). This is called being vanquished with regard to present qualities.

Chasing after the past, placing expectations on the future, being caught in the dualistic, comparing, judging mind are the hallmarks of the false mind, also called the mind of the ordinary person or the past-present-future mind. In four short verses, the Buddha urges his disciples to abandon the false mind.

When we chase after the past, we replay in our mind sad memories, we regret those pleasant moments that are gone, we regret opportunities lost, we resent words or actions that have hurt us, we feel anger and hatred towards people who we think have caused us harm. When we place expectations on the future, we want to grasp the possessions, honors, love that we think we lack, we resent people who we think have what we don't, we feel sad about unfulfilled ambitions, we feel anger and hatred towards those we think are the cause of our current predicaments. When we live under the misconception that the ego is real, we compare, we differentiate, we want to accumulate more for us, we resent people who we think are superior to us, we look down on people who we think are inferior to us, we see what is wrong with people, we see what is right in us, we feel sorrow for being in what we think is an unfulfilling situation.

"The past is left behind", but we do not accept that the past is gone, we continue to be attached to events in the past and this causes us sorrow and suffering. "The future is yet unreached", and may never be reached, yet we yearn for it, we want to grasp it, we get caught in dreams that may never be realized. The ego does not have a real existence but we think that it is real, and get caught in differentiating, comparing, and in unquenchable craving. While our mind chases objects in the past, future and present, we forget the wonderful reality that is happening around us. We forget to look after the wellbeing of our body and mind, we forget those around us who need our help.

Chasing after the past, placing expectations on the future, being caught in the present create powerful waves that rumble through our mind and affect our present moment. These waves can sometimes generate feelings of compassion and altruism, but more often than not they generate anxiety, fear, horror, sadness, pain, cruelty. This is because our mind has the habit of making up stories, dramatizing what is trivial, over-reacting to what is unimportant, and complicating what is simple. In the process, it generates thoughts of madness, darkness, fear, sorrow and hatred. These feelings profoundly impact on our mind and can create illnesses in our body through the process of interaction between mind and body. At that very moment we generate intention karma, and when thoughts and feelings explode into actions, we also generate speech karma and bodily karma. The karma may be good or bad, but more often than not it will be bad karma because the ego has the tendency to think ill, bad, wrong things about others. In accordance with the law of karma, we will reap the fruit of what we sow.

Chasing after the past, future or present leads us down the spiraling vortex of ambition, regret, greed that can never be fulfilled, of wanting something else when we have just reached what we wanted. This is because underneath is the unquenchable craving of the ego, its constant feeling of anxiety, of wanting more. It is because underneath is the mass of mental defilements, old habits, fetters and underlying tendencies, that we carry in our false mind from many lives past.

5. The Here and Now

*Whatever quality is present
One clearly sees right there,
Unvanquished, unshaken.*

Here the Buddha taught his disciples how to escape the past-present-future mind. In the verse "Whatever quality is present" does not refer to the present of the past-present-future mind but the "here and now", which is also the state of wordless awareness. From this point, "one clearly sees right there", which means seeing with the eye of wisdom, or "passati" in Pāli. Seeing with the eye of wisdom means recognizing the true essence of worldly phenomena.

What is seeing with the eye of wisdom? This means that when the senses come into contact with the object, one identifies the object as what "it presently is", one recognizes "the here-and-now" of the object without feeling any emotions of joy or sadness, without any thoughts arising in the mind. This is also the immediate, innate knowledge, the primordial flash of awareness of the wordless awareness mind. Wordless awareness is the clear awareness of the surrounding environment without any attachment. Wordless awareness occurs when the eye sees the objects before it without being attracted to them, or when the ear hears the sounds but the mind is not caught in them, or when the body experiences a touch on the skin or feelings from inside the body but the mind does not follow these sensations.

When we live with wordless awareness, we clearly perceive the content of the objects we come into contact with without being attached to them. As a result, we do not get seduced or dominated by the object if it is attractive. Similarly, if the object betrays or humiliates our ego, we remain calm and detached. In this way, the turbulences of life do not shake our mind. Chinese 7th century Zen Master Hàn Sơn talked about the mind being impervious to the eight winds. These are the winds of success and failure, praise and criticism, shame and honor, pain and pleasure. When we live with wordless awareness, our mind is not moved by the eight winds, neither when honor befalls us nor when decline or loss comes upon us, neither in suffering nor in joy.

We are only able to influence the present moment at the place where we are. Whether we are happy or sad, our mind is at peace or troubled, our physical body goes towards health or sickness, we create good karma or bad karma, all happens in the here and now. We can only change our karma in the here and now. When our mind lives in the past, when we dream about the future, when we are attached to things in the present, we forget the life that is happening here and now, we forget ourselves and we forget those around us.

6. Diligent practice

*That's how one develops the mind.
Ardently doing one's duty today,
For — who knows? — tomorrow death may come.
There is no bargaining with Death and his mighty horde.*

The Buddha knows that the worldly mind is always slothful, likes to procrastinate and seek excuses, and this is why he taught us to diligently practice from this very moment, without delay. He also reminds us of the law of impermanence. All objects and events in the world exist due to numerous causal conditions, and they change every second of time due to changes in these causal conditions. The life that we have now may end at any time. In another discourse where the Buddha taught his disciples about impermanence, he asked them: “How long is a life?” When they answered one year, one month, one week, three days, Buddha continues to shake his head. Not until the answer that life lasts just a breath does he accept it as correct. So when we have seen clearly the spiritual practice we must start practicing from the moment of our realization and not procrastinate further. The message of the Buddha to his disciples before he passed away was thus: “All conditioned phenomena are impermanent, practice diligently, do not have distractions” (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, sutta number 16, Dīgha Nikāya, or “collection of long discourses of the Buddha”).

Through the above verses, the Buddha also reminds us that human life is very precious. Sentient beings reincarnate over thousands of lives through the six realms of existence and must collect great merits to be able to reincarnate as human beings. Furthermore, only a human being can achieve Buddhahood, even beings that dwell in the Heaven realm must reincarnate as a human being in order to achieve Buddhahood. Hence human life is very precious, and we should not waste the very precious opportunity that is life as a human being to practice towards Buddhahood.

When we leave this world, we cannot bring with us wealth, fame or loved ones. What we bring with us to the next life is a part of our consciousness. Instead of wealth, we carry greed in our consciousness; instead of our loved ones, we carry craving; instead of our enemies, we carry hatred. Our consciousness, which includes all the mental defilements, old habits, fetters and underlying tendencies that we carry from lives innumerable, is the baggage that we bring with us when we are reborn. Only through practice can we eliminate from our consciousness this web of mental defilements, old habits, fetters and underlying tendencies, cutting the causes of rebirth and ceasing suffering.

7. The silent and peaceful sage

*Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly
Both day and night,
Has truly had an auspicious day:
So says the Peaceful Sage.*

Here, the Buddha states that one must diligently live every moment in wordless awareness, day and night without fail or falter, so as to live every moment awakened in the here and now. To dwell in wordless awareness, we must eliminate in every moment the mental chatter that arises ceaselessly in our mind from chasing the past, expecting the future and comparing in the present. Mental chatter is a habit that we have forged since birth, so we must practice intensely to have a chance to eliminate it. Stop the mental chatter, and wordless awareness immediately shines through; our mind instantly stops the agitated chasing after objects and becomes quiet; the dark shadow of the ego evaporates. The result shows in our brightened facial expression, our dignified gestures, and our measured speech. Only then do we deserve to be called a peaceful silent sage.

“Peaceful silent sage” is also the literal meaning of the word “muni” in the name Sakkamuni Buddha (S: Sayamuni). In that state of peace, the thought and language formation processes are quiet, no mental chatter arises in the mind; we constantly

dwelling in silent wordless awareness; we go through life, but our mind is not caught; we live in peace and equanimity.

8. Conclusion: practice considerations

At all times, when we are sitting, walking, standing, eating, working etc..., when our senses come into contact with objects, we keep a clear, silent awareness of what is happening. This is living in awareness or living in the here-and-now.

This awareness is a wordless awareness or a wordless self-awareness, it is not the same as paying attention (mindfulness) or concentration.

Paying attention or concentration are functions of the consciousness that always involve effort and attachment towards the object. The difference between awareness and mindfulness/concentration is a critical point that we need to have a clear understanding of in order to achieve a correct practice.

