

Impurity

Now you are like a withered leaf; the messengers of Yama await you. It is the eve of your departure, and you have made no provision for your journey!

Quickly make for yourself an island of refuge, strive hard and become wise. When you are cleansed and purified of all impurity, you will enter the heavenly home of the Noble Ones.

Now your days are numbered, you are in the presence of the God of death. You have no resting-place on the road, no provision for the journey.

Quickly make for yourself an island of refuge, strive hard and become wise. When you are cleansed and purified of all impurity, you will be reborn no more, you will no more be subject to decay.

Just as the smith refines the silver, so also, little by little from moment to moment, the wise man purifies himself of his impurities.

When rust appears on iron, the iron itself is corrupted by it. So also, a man's evil actions corrupt him and lead him to his doom.

Lack of repetition impairs the effect of mantras.¹ Neglect impairs the solidity of houses. Indolence impairs the beauty of the body. Lack of attention is the downfall of one who watches.

¹ Words charged with spiritual power.

Questions and Answers

Misconduct is the taint of a woman. Meanness is the taint of one who gives. Wrong-doing is a taint in this world and the other.

The greatest of all taints is ignorance. Cleanse yourselves of that taint alone and you will be free of all taints, O Bhikkhus.

Life is easy for one who is impudent as a crow, malicious, boastful, presumptuous and corrupt.

Life is hard for the modest one who seeks purity, who is detached, unassuming and whose judgment is correct.

Already in this world he is uprooted, the one who destroys life, who lies, who takes what he has not been given, who covets the wife of another and who is addicted to drink.

Know that evil things are difficult to master. Let not cravings and wickedness subject you to endless suffering.

Each one gives according to his faith or his liking; if you are discontented with the food and drink offered by another, you will not achieve concentration by night or by day.

But the one who uproots and destroys in himself the very root of such a feeling of resentment, achieves concentration by night and by day.

There is no fire like the fire of craving, no grip like that of hatred. There is no snare like that of delusion, no torrent like desire.

It is easy to see the faults of others, but difficult to perceive our own shortcomings. We winnow the faults of

others like chaff, but we hide our own like the wily gambler concealing his foul throw.

One who always criticises the faults of others and is irritated by them, far from becoming free of faults, increases his own vices.

There is no track in the sky, no Samana² outside the true path. Man delights in vanity. The Tathagatas³ have overcome these obstacles.

There is no track in the sky, no Samana outside the true path. No conditioned thing can last, but the Buddhas remain for ever immutable.

I have read your notes on the control of speech. Some have tried very seriously. I am happy with the result. I believe it will be good for everyone if you continue.

Someone has written me something which is very true: that when one begins, one has no reason to stop, one begins with one hour a day, but this becomes a kind of necessity, a habit and one continues quite naturally.

If your exercise truly has this result, then it will be an excellent thing.

We can select three things from what I have read this evening. The first is that you must persist in what you do if you want to get a result. The Dhammapada tells us, for example, that if you have a mantra and do not repeat it sufficiently, there is no use in having it and that if you are inattentive, you lose the benefit of vigilance, and that if you do not continue in the good habits that you acquire, they are useless — that is to say, you must persevere. As for example, with the exercise which I asked you to do last

² Ascetic.

³ The Buddhas who, according to tradition, came on earth to reveal the eternal Truth.

Questions and Answers

time; I asked you to do it with the idea that if you form the habit of doing it, that will help you much in overcoming your difficulties.

Already someone has told me, quite rightly, that while practising this half-silence, or at any rate this continence of speech, one achieves quite naturally the mastery of numerous difficulties in one's character and also one avoids a great many frictions and misunderstandings. This is true.

Another point to remember from our reading concerns impurity and the Dhammapada gives the example of bad will and wrong action. Wrong action, says our text, is a taint in this world as well as in others. In the next verse it is said that there is no greater impurity than ignorance, that is to say, ignorance is considered as the essential, the central fault, which urgently needs to be corrected, and what is called ignorance is not simply not knowing things, not having the superficial knowledge of things, it means forgetting the very reason of our existence, the truth that has to be discovered.

There was a third thing?... Yes, you must not cherish the illusion that if you want to follow the straight path, if you are modest, if you seek purity, if you are disinterested, if you want to lead a solitary existence and have a clear judgment, things will become easy.... It is quite the contrary! When you begin to advance towards inner and outer perfection, the difficulties start at the same time.

I have very often heard people saying, "Oh! now that I am trying to be good, everybody seems to be bad to me!" But this is precisely to teach you that one should not be good with an interested motive, one should not be good so that others will be good to you — one must be good for the sake of being good.

It is always the same lesson: one must do as well as one can, the best one can, but without expecting a result, without doing it with a view to the result. Just this attitude, to expect a reward for a good action — to become good because one thinks that this will make life easier — takes away all value from the good action.

You must be good for the love of goodness, you must be just

On the Dhammapada

for the love of justice, you must be pure for the love of purity and
you must be disinterested for the love of disinterestedness; then
you are sure to advance on the way.

13 June 1958