

Let Only Bones And Sinews Remain

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(Edited transcript of Hillside Hermitage Dhamma talk No.175)

Bhikkhus, I have known two qualities through experience: discontent concerning beneficial qualities and diligence.

Diligently I persisted, thinking, 'Gladly would I let my flesh and blood dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through manly strength, persistence, and striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.'

Through such vigilance, awakening and unexcelled freedom from bondage was attained. - An 2.5

Ajahn Nyanamoli: To make the right effort, you must know what the right effort is. A common interpretation of that passage is that it refers to an unwavering, blind determination, such as thinking, "I won't move until I am enlightened!". That's misguided on various levels, the first of which is - do you even know what enlightenment is? Do you understand exactly how unenlightened you are and how much work needs to be done to complete the job? Because a person who understands knows what needs to be done, and can see the extent of his mind that needs to be developed. So do you see that for yourself before you make that determination? You may realise, "That's not what I understand. Yet, here I am determining that I will not move, breathe, or whatever else until I become enlightened."

The reason such determination is misguided is that it is based on blind faith that if you exhibit unwavering determination, *enlightenment* will happen to you. Even if you don't know what the goal is. It is unwise to believe or hope that enlightenment will come to you simply because you so desperately desire it.

So when the Buddha says: '*Gladly would I let my flesh and blood dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through manly strength, persistence, and striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence*'. That's done by one who knows exactly what needs to be done. For example, you recognize that the thought of sensuality is not your problem. Accepting the thought of sensuality, welcoming it, delighting in it, not seeing through it, not seeing the nature of it, that is your problem.

So you have to distinguish where the work is, which is not entertaining sensuality, not being careless about it, and not doing things that will increase sensuality and decrease non-sensuality. Be determined not to move in that regard, no matter what. Whenever there is a sensual thought, you do not give in to it. You don't need to get rid of everything and die in some little hole, not eating or drinking until you magically become enlightened. Just do not tolerate sensuality or aversion regardless of what circumstances throw at you for the rest of your life.

The determination that the Sutta describes is based upon having fully discerned the path of what needs to be done. So unless you know what needs to be done, your determination will be misguided. Therefore, instead of ambiguously determining to become enlightened, make sure your determination is rooted in knowledge of exactly what you need to do, because the path, let alone the goal, cannot be obtained by wishing, "Oh, may I become enlightened!". If you are not undoing the things that obstruct enlightenment then you won't become enlightened.

If you don't know what enlightenment is, how about determining that you will not rest until you find out? Instead of entertaining wishful thinking about enlightenment happening to you, on account of some random practices with good intentions.

How can you figure out what enlightenment is? Start reading the Buddha's words, start thinking and reflecting on them, start questioning what you understood, and remove ignorance layer by layer. Determine that you will not rest until you get the right view, which doesn't mean you'll never sleep, it means that you will never forget what your goal is.

Through determined contemplation of the teachings, you will learn about and eventually get to know what enlightenment is, and exactly what you need to do, at which point you can apply your determination to do what needs to be done, i.e. the practice of the Middle Way.

Whenever you want to learn a new thing, the beginning is always the hardest, it's difficult to even muster that strength to begin because you don't know anything about the skill that you are trying to learn. For example, wanting to learn a language, instead of aiming at the level of being fluent. How about deciding to spend five minutes reading the other language every day, not more than that, just five minutes, but do it consistently, it doesn't matter what comes out of it, you just do it. And then before you know it, you're much more familiar. The more familiar you become, the more new ways of furthering the training will present themselves, because you started building it up from the right level, from the bottom up. Don't just see where you are now and imagine the result of enlightenment, and then try and determine the enlightenment, hoping that it will happen to you while bypassing all the steps in between. The development of Awakening just doesn't work like that.

If a bhikkhu should wish: 'May I, with the destruction of three fetters, become a stream-enterer, no longer subject to bad destinations, bound for freedom, headed for enlightenment,' let him fulfill the precepts, be devoted to unity of mind, not neglect jhana, be possessed of insight, and dwell in empty huts..... It was regarding this that it was said: 'Bhikkhus, dwell possessed of virtue, possessed of the Pātimokkha, restrained with the restraint of the Pātimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort, seeing fear in the slightest fault, train by undertaking the training precepts. - Mn 6

Q: The first Sutta says: *I have known two qualities through experience: discontent concerning beneficial qualities and diligence.*

Nm: He was discontent with beneficial qualities because such contentment does not come automatically. You need to develop it on account of sticking to what the wise say is beneficial. And that's why it's so hard, you cannot arrive at the Dhamma accidentally because even if you get the beneficial thing, it doesn't feel right. You're discontent about it. But if you discern to some degree that it's the right thing and have some faith, contentment will arise. And then it will be effortless. Tireless energy will arise as a consequence of that right discernment.

Bhikkhus, for a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher's instruction, it is natural that he conducts himself thus: 'The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple; the Blessed One knows, I do not know.' For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher's instruction, the Teacher's instruction is nourishing and refreshing.

For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher's instruction, it is natural that he conducts himself thus: 'Gladly would I let my flesh and blood dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be reached through manly strength, persistence, and striving, there will be no relaxing my persistence.'

For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher's instruction, one of two fruits may be expected: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of assumptions left, non-return. - Mn70
