

Dharma talk: Remorse, Repentance, and Residue

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Quotes from verses of Faith-Mind by Seng-ta'an, Third Zen Patriarch

On right effort:

"When you try to stop activity to achieve quietude,
Your very effort fills you with activity."

We are just sitting here, alive and awake, curious and attentive.
The rest is just content, the passing show, what ever comes down
stream.

We can practice holding the content lightly, with an open heart and
mind.

We are told:

"Do not seek for the truth;
only cease to cherish opinions."

Is most everything the mind creates opinion?

"...and the burdensome practice of judging
brings annoyance and weariness."

So we become aware of our judgement mind and hold that lightly,
also.

For this little talk, you can listen lightly, hearing what you need to hear
in the words and the spaces between the words.

I would like to speak a bit on remorse and repentance and the residue
even healthy repentance leaves behind.

Long after the important work of coming out of ignorance of our habits and understanding the effects of those habits,

and even after the dedicated efforts of our well-formed intentions have led to new habits,

sometimes what comes down stream is the residue of that work.

This deserves investigation.

How can we approach remorse and repentance in a healthy way, without tripping up on the naturally arising obstacles of that work?

We need to establish the necessary equanimity of mind in order to prevent ourselves from get repeatedly sucked into our tendency to fall into the habits of shame and guilt.

These are big words, loaded with meaning, and ambiguity, so we will take this very slowly.

As we sit here, quietly, doing nothing, on occasion a new insight into our behavior, our thoughts, our basic assumptions, our attitude can arise. In Buddhist terms, we move from ignorance to understanding. And all good insights come with a "duh". How could I not see that before? I see how I repeatedly create the same situation over and over.

I will give a fanciful example: I witness in my tendency to ruminate as I sit here, and I now see that I keep setting a trap for the people closest to me,

Who might be me,

to disappoint me, by not obeying my rules of right behavior, which proves they are bad and I am good,

at least I want to be good,

and I need to keep my distance. And no one loves me or understands me and I am going to back myself into this corner and believe all this to be true. Or I am bad because I am reacting this way.

Good or bad, it doesn't matter,

And all these beliefs spin into my familiar and favorite hell realms. And it turns out that these rules of mine they

or I

keep breaking are merely my way of trapping them into betraying me. And I have done this to myself and I have taken with me the people who are closest to me. Oh, my, goodness.

With this discovery of self-generated suffering, we know ourselves better. We can shed light onto these patterns. And it can be painful to know.

And we discover that no matter if we end up placing ourselves on the superior or inferior end of the spectrum or our own making, we are still creating a fixed, inaccurate self-portrait, or portrait of the other person, which becomes a stumbling block I place in front of my blind self. It does not matter if I elevate or denigrate myself, if I believe it to be true, it becomes a kind of laziness, and it pulls me into a passive and pessimistic life. Self-effacement is just as tricky form of self-centeredness as self-aggrandizement.

Repentance begins with waking up to the process, opening our eyes to see that to which we were previously blind. And we get that delightful, liberating, sometimes exceedingly painful "duh" moment, as we know something new, that was there the whole time. We see what pain our ignorance was causing. The heart-mind feels remorse. This is healthy. We are understanding the effect of our actions and our beliefs, and sometimes it is humbling, and on occasion feels humiliating. This is a good thing. Our capacity for repentance and

remorse need to be harnessed for liberation. They need to become a noble quality.

That painful and or liberating moment of clarity then requires forming a sincere intention to keep witnessing the habits of creating stumbling blocks and our tendency to be ignorant of the wiles of our judgmental mind. We have to practice not believing the portrait we habitual paint of ourselves and others. We have to practice not cherishing our opinions and calling them truth. We must to practice not knowing.

It's good to know we are just sitting here, not doing anything. We can't be being either good or bad. We are just sitting here. Awake. So if any thoughts or memories come up that are cringe-worthy, it is good to know they are surfacing from the past and not actually happening in the world, now.

This afternoon becomes a really good time to experience the residue of past. We can know that when guilt and shame surface, or we are wielding the knife to eviscerate ourselves for something we did in the past, that we are not actively committing that 'sin' right now.

Paraphrasing--

In reality, we probably have already repented sincerely and honestly for what we have just remembered, but the idea of repentance or remorse still tightly attaches to the root of the memory. We continue carry the suffering along with the memory--not because we are still acting in that manner, but because of the consciousness of remorse constantly runs in the reality of our mind-stream. The result is that every time we remember a certain mistake from our past, we again suffer and deplore ourselves. That is just the way the mind works.

For this reason, after having repented sincerely, we need to spend more time practicing the skills mindfulness and integrating certain truths, such as non-identification with those thoughts. It is helpful to remember impermanence. It is essential to understand that if I get stuck in self-denigration that it will lead to pessimism and passivity.

Simultaneously, we also need to cultivate the virtues--namely, to practice qualities such as charity or public service and generosity.

This includes charity and generosity toward ourselves.

"...and the burdensome practice of judging brings annoyance and weariness."

So let us also practice comfort and ease, while we are just sitting here, awake. We are already experts at annoying ourselves.

Paraphrasing Khai'Thien, "Repentance--the Way to Become Sainted"
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