

## Overcoming the 5 mental barrennesses (2 of 2)

Source: **(Majjhima) Ceto, khila Sutta**, how to free the mind and liberate it (M 16, SD 32.14).<sup>1</sup> by Piya Tan © 2017.

### 4.1.4 “Neither doubtful nor uncertain, but committed and faithful in the training” [§18]

**4.1.4.1** To have faith in **the training** means, firstly, that we understand or accept the fact that our problems are not really “out there,” but really “in here” (in our mind or heart). We can try to solve every problem that hits us, but there seems to be no end to it. This is a “symptomatic” cure—curing only the symptoms, but not the whole problem.

Looking at the problem “in here” means we seek to understand how our mind works and how conditions work to make things happen. We seek to understand how we conceive things (how we construct realities out of like, dislike, delusion and fear)<sup>2</sup> and perceive them (how we project our biases onto external events).

**4.1.4.2** Like it or not, we create situations with what we **say, do or think**.<sup>3</sup> Normally, we are able to deal with such situations, even enjoy doing so. But, in time, such situations become problematic for various reasons, so that we have difficulties dealing with them. Even just thinking about them becomes problematic.

This means that what we say, do or think, have consequences, and we are, if we act deliberately (with intent), we are accountable for our actions. Often enough, even when we do not act deliberately (such as when we act without intent or *not consciously*), bad consequences can still follow. In this latter case, although we are not responsible for *unintentional* acts, we are still karmically responsible for our unconscious acts (such as habitual killing by a hunter or fisherman).<sup>4</sup>

**4.1.4.3** The point is that we can prevent conscious negative actions or minimize the negative effects of our unconscious actions by being mindful. **To be mindful** means that we can well restrain our 3 doors of action: we are in good control of our speech, actions and thoughts.

Taking charge of our **speech** means avoiding wrong speech (lying, slander, harsh speech and idle chatter) and practising right speech (speech that is truthful, unifying, friendly and useful).<sup>5</sup> Here, “speech” includes any kind of communication written (letters, books, etc), digital, or any form of communication, including being silent when such silence can cause harm or suffering to others.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SD 32.14: <http://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/32.14-Majjhima-Cetokhila-S-116-piya.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> These are the 4 biases (*agati*): **Sigal’ovāda S** (D 31,4+5) SD 4.1 called “4 motives” (*ṭhāna*); **Agati S 1** (A 4.17) SD 89.7; **Saṅgaha Bala S** (A 9.5,6.4) n, SD 2.21; SD 31.12 (6/4/1/3).

<sup>3</sup> These are the 3 karmic doors (*dvāra*): see SD 5.7 (2.2.2).

<sup>4</sup> In essence, this is how karma works. For details, see **Karma**, SD 18.1. On unconscious karma, see **(Kamma, vāda) Bhūmija S** (S 12.25), SD 31.2.

<sup>5</sup> On wrong speech (*micchā, vācā*) and right speech (*sammā, vācā*), see SD 10.16 (3).

<sup>6</sup> On “wrong silence,” see SD 44.1 (1.2.1.9).

**4.1.4.4 The 5 precepts** (*pañca, sīla*) comprise 5 voluntary abstinences—those against *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and drunkenness and addiction*.<sup>7</sup> These are wrong acts, when habitually committed, not only bring us bad karma, but also prevents us from mental cultivation. One of the key reasons for this is that when our mind starts to be calm, we begin to recall these wrong acts and feel guilty or troubled by them. “Restlessness and worry” (*uddhacca, kukkuccha*) are of one of the 5 mental hindrances to meditative focus and progress.<sup>8</sup>

Moral virtue, then, is a vital foundation for effective meditation and mental cultivation. The 5 precepts act as reminders to us to abstain from 5 common very negative bad karmic habits. They are preventives or deterrents to bad karma of body and speech. When we keep our precepts well, we are said to be “bodily cultivated” (*bhāvita, kāya*). They are, in short, the 5 criteria of quality control in our personal and social life.<sup>9</sup>

**4.1.4.5** To have **faith in the precepts** means to understand how they work, and to keep to them with lovingkindness. Without lovingkindness, we are merely following rules as a ritual, which may make us self-righteous and conceited, instead of working to overcome self-centredness. For, to live a moral life means that we unconditionally acknowledge the existence, lives and happiness of others. Just as we love life and want to be happy, so do other living beings, too. This is the golden rule.<sup>10</sup>

**4.1.4.6** When we keep the precepts joyfully with lovingkindness, we develop our body into a vehicle for a mind of calm and clarity. A cultivated body is the ground for a cultivated mind: a healthy body supports a healthy mind. **Meditation** (*bhāvanā*)<sup>11</sup> begins here, but it must leave the body and its senses—the doors to the world—behind. The mind must stand on its own, and look at itself, into itself, to see that calm and clarity.

**Faith in meditation** means that we keep our mind free from intoxicants and additives, free from thoughts and views—like a clear mirror that reflects our image just as we are. We begin to see ourself just as we are. This self-knowledge is the door to further self-discovery, self-understanding, ending in self-liberation. The “self” here is none other than the mind itself. The mind that is liberated from the “self” is a profoundly radiant, beautiful and wise.

**4.1.4.7 Wisdom** means doing the right thing with knowledge so that we deepen the mind’s calm and clarity into beauty and truth of our life and the world. This is essentially what the training in wisdom is about. **Faith in wisdom** means the courage to look at the world calmly and clearly right in the eye to see it for what it really is—impermanent, changing, become other. This is the beautiful truth that frees us from the world so that we can take the first step on the path of awakening.

#### **4.1.5 “Neither angry nor displeased with fellow brahmafarrers, his heart untroubled, not unfeeling” [§19]**

**4.1.5.1 A “brahmafarrer”** (*brahma, cārī*) is a monastic (a monk or a nun) who has openly declared (through the ordination ceremony) that he (which includes she) is willing and able to restrain the body

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<sup>7</sup> On the 5 precepts (*pañca, sīla*), see **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) SD 1.5 (1+2) the golden rule; **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11 (2.2); SD 21.6 (1.2); SD 37.8 (2.2).

<sup>8</sup> On “restlessness and worry,” see SD 32.7 (2.1), esp (2.1.4).

<sup>9</sup> See **Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja S** (S 35.127, 7), SD 27.61.

<sup>10</sup> **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7) @ SD 1.5 (1).

<sup>11</sup> On meditation, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1.

for the sake of mental cultivation to diligently work for awakening in this life itself—if not, at least, for a vision of that path as a streamwinner.

***Brahma, cariya*** means “holy life,” a Brahmā-like life, the true renunciant monastic life—a life that rises above all the pleasures of the body, especially sex, and what feeds that body in and to the world, especially wealth and money. This is a spiritual life that we freely choose so that we will be truly free of the world and awaken in this life itself.

**4.1.5.2 The Cūḷa Go,siṅga Sutta** (M 31) is a beautiful discourse on **the ideal fellowship** of true brahmafarers—exemplified by the monks Anuruddha, Nandiya and Kimbila—who, despite living together in silent retreat, are able to communicate with one another whenever they needed to. In the Buddha’s words, they are described as “**all dwelling in concord, in mutual joy, without disputing, mixing like milk and water, looking at each other with kindly eyes.**” Furthermore, they dwell together with lovingkindness in deed, speech and mind. They would “put aside their own mind” and subject themselves to their mind of their colleagues. Their constant state of mind is that “we may be of different bodies, but we’re of one mind!”<sup>12</sup>

**4.1.5.3** The brahmafarers are “**neither angry nor displeased with fellow brahmafarers**” because of their Dharma practice and keeping to the Vinaya. They are all guided by the common purpose of inner peace and a vision of the path of awakening. Their minds are “**untroubled**” because of the joyful peace they enjoy through their meditation, especially by way of breath meditation [3.3.4.2]. Their hearts are “**not unfeeling**” because they are filled with the divine abodes of lovingkindness, compassion, gladness and equanimity. [4.2]

**4.1.5.4** Renunciants have **faith in their fellow brahmafarers** because of their Dharma practice and the Vinaya, both of which makes the community a spiritual family headed by the Buddha himself. It is this kind of **familiarity, confidence, trust and closeness** (*vissāsa*) that make the noble sangha a true family, so that its members live together mingling warmly like relatives—“the trusty are the best relatives,” *vissāsa, paramā ñātī* (Dh 204).

In other words, the members of the noble sangha all have faith in one another, and this quality is often well emulated by the conventional sangha members, too. We, too, should emulate this common faith so that our society is truly a spiritual community, and wherever we meet another Buddhist, we feel a deep sense of faith and love in one another.

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<sup>12</sup> M 31,6-7/1:206 (SD 44.11).