

## Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone

I heard these words of the Buddha one time when the Lord was staying at the monastery in the Jeta Grove, in the town of Savatthi. He called all the monks to him and instructed them, “Bhikkhus!”

And the bhikkhus replied, “We are here.”

The Blessed One taught, “I will teach you what is meant by ‘knowing the better way to live alone.’ I will begin with an outline of the teaching, and then I will give a detailed explanation. Bhikkhus, please listen carefully.”

“Blessed One, we are listening.” The Buddha taught:

“Do not pursue the past.

Do not lose yourself in the future.

The past no longer is.

The future has not yet come.

Looking deeply at life as it is in the very here and now, the practitioner dwells in stability and freedom.

We must be diligent today.

To wait till tomorrow is too late.

Death comes unexpectedly.

How can we bargain with it?

The sage calls a person who dwells in mindfulness night and day, ‘the one who knows the better way to live alone.’

“Bhikkhus, what do we mean by ‘pursuing the past’? When someone considers the way her body was in the past, the way her feelings were in the past, the way her perceptions were in the past, the way her mental formations were in the past, the way her consciousness was in the past; when she considers these things and her mind is burdened by and attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is pursuing the past.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not pursuing the past’? When someone considers the way her body was in the past, the way her feelings were in the past, the way her perceptions were in the past, the way her mental formations were in the past, the way her consciousness was in the past; when she considers these things, but her mind is neither enslaved by nor attached to these things which belong to the past, then that person is not pursuing the past.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘losing yourself in the future’? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things and his mind is burdened by and daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then that person is losing himself in the future.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not losing yourself in the future’? When someone considers the way his body will be in the future, the way his feelings will be in the future, the way his perceptions will be in the future, the way his mental formations will be in the future, the way his consciousness will be in the future; when he considers these things, but his mind is not burdened by or daydreaming about these things which belong to the future, then he is not losing himself in the future.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘being swept away by the present’? When someone does not study or learn anything about the Awakened One, or the teachings of love and understanding,

or the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows nothing about the noble teachers and their teachings, and does not practice these teachings, and thinks, ‘This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,’ then that person is being swept away by the present.

“Bhikkhus, what is meant by ‘not being swept away by the present’? When someone studies and learns about the Awakened One, the teachings of love and understanding, and the community that lives in harmony and awareness; when that person knows about noble teachers and their teachings, practices these teachings, and does not think; ‘This body is myself; I am this body. These feelings are myself; I am these feelings. This perception is myself; I am this perception. This mental formation is myself; I am this mental formation. This consciousness is myself; I am this consciousness,’ then that person is not being swept away by the present.

“Bhikkhus, I have presented the outline and the detailed explanation of knowing the better way to live alone.”

Thus the Buddha taught, and the bhikkhus were delighted to put his teachings into practice.

Bhaddekaratta Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 131

#### **Note**

*This translation of the Discourse on Knowing the Better Way to Live Alone has been prepared by **Thich Nhat Hanh**. This text is known in the Pali Canon as the Bhaddekaratta Sutta, and can be found in the Majjhima Nikaya No.131. In the Chinese Canon it can be found in the Madhyama Āgama.*

*This translation is recited regularly at Plum Village Practice Centers around the world, as part of our daily sitting and chanting sessions.*

*It appears in **Chanting From the Heart** (Parallax Press, Rev.Ed., 2006, pp. 282-284).*