

Dhammapada: Appamāda-Vagga (Annotated)

Verses of Truth: Vigilance Chapter

Translated and Annotated by Suddhāso Bhikkhu

(21)

**Vigilance is the path to the deathless, negligence is the path of death.
The vigilant never die, the negligent are as if already dead.**

(22)

**Understanding this distinction, the wise remain vigilant.
They delight in vigilance, focused on the domain of the noble ones.**

One of the most vital aspects of Buddhist practice is vigilance (appamāda) – constantly keeping watch over our minds, and protecting it from harmful, unwholesome mindstates (such as greed, hatred, resentment, and jealousy). This is directly related to mindfulness practice; vigilance requires clear awareness in every moment. And that continual clear awareness brings a natural vibrancy to our lives; those who lack such vibrancy are like the walking dead: only half-alive at best. Such constant vigilance is described as the domain of the “noble ones” - those who have attained enlightenment.

(23)

**They meditate continuously, permanently, resolutely;
Those steadfast ones touch Nibbāna - the unsurpassed freedom from bondage.**

A brief reminder of the importance of practicing meditation frequently: it is through meditation practice that one is able to attain liberation.

(24)

**Glory grows for those who are alert and mindful,
Of pure conduct, acting carefully, self-restrained,
Living in accord with the Dhamma, and vigilant.**

Dhamma is not practiced for the sake of fame and honor; and in fact the desire for fame and honor are themselves impediments to progress on the path. However, as one makes progress on the path, one tends to become increasingly appealing to others: while not the goal of our practice, this is a pleasant side-effect of it.

(25)

**By means of alertness and vigilance, self-restraint and training,
The wise make an island which no flood can submerge.**

In the Suttas, the term “flood” (Pāli: ogha) refers to the torrent of mental defilements that overwhelms us: the seemingly ceaseless flow of desires, dislikes, and distorted perspectives. Our practices of meditation and mental self-control develop an increasing resistance to this inner torrent, and eventually culminate in total immunity.

(26)

**Unwise fools are committed to negligence,
And the wise to vigilance - guarding it like the greatest treasure.**

Vigilance is indeed our greatest treasure, as it is through constant attention to our minds that we are able to protect it from afflictive tendencies.

(27)

**Do not commit yourself to negligence!
Do not become fond of sensuality!
A vigilant meditator reaches abundant bliss.**

There is a good reason for practicing diligently: With enough effort in one's meditation, one can experience remarkably intense states of physical and mental pleasure. And if one tries hard enough, one can eventually overcome the underlying source of dissatisfaction and arrive at the highest form of happiness: Nibbāna.

(28)

**When a wise person dispels negligence using vigilance,
Having ascended in the palace of wisdom,
Sorrowless amidst the sorrowing populace,
Such a wise one looks at fools,
As one standing on a mountain looks at those on the ground.**

This illustrates the change in perspective that occurs when we make an ongoing effort to watch the mind. As we make progress in overcoming the self-defeating patterns that we have been engaged in, we begin to notice that we are uncommon: most people are caught in their habitual cycles of self-inflicted turmoil. However, it is important that we make an effort to avoid falling into arrogance and self-importance on this account; we recognize the benefits we are accruing and acknowledge that we are no longer as tormented as the average person, but we do not use this as a basis for conceit.

(29)

**Vigilant among the negligent, wide awake among the sleeping,
The wise one leaves them behind and moves on,
As a swift horse leaves behind a feeble one.**

When we constantly watch our minds all day long and make a concerted effort to restrain our negative impulses, then it is natural that we will make swift progress. There is not much that can be done for those who are not interested in self-development - we cannot force anyone to practice - so instead we focus on developing our own practice and let others do as they will.

(30)

By means of vigilance Maghavā became the best of the devas;

They praise vigilance - negligence is always criticized.

Maghavā is an epithet of Sakka, the lord of the deva realm Tāvātimsa. It is good karma to carefully watch our minds, and to make an effort to eliminate unwholesome mindstates and develop wholesome mindstates; therefore such efforts, if they do not culminate in enlightenment, can lead to experiencing pleasant states of existence - such as living the life of a lord among devas in a heavenly world.

(31)

**When a monk delights in vigilance and sees the danger in negligence,
Like fire, he burns up attachments - large and small.**

(32)

**When a monk delights in vigilance and sees the danger in negligence,
It is impossible for him to fail - he is close to Nibbāna.**

Although the Buddha refers to a 'monk' (bhikkhu) here, this also applies to any sincerely devoted practitioner. Here he indicates the power of vigilance: when we closely observe the mind and cut off harmful impulses, then the root of all suffering - desire and attachment - will be destroyed. And when the mind is firmly established in continuous practice, there is no way that one can backslide: enlightenment is inevitable.