

# The Path of Honesty

“True fearlessness comes from the knowledge that we will never lie to ourselves, that we will never evade a single moment of our lives. We will be fully present for every moment and every consequence.”

*THE VENERABLE SHYALPA RINPOCHE*

In Buddhist practice, being honest with ourselves is the most important virtue. By being honest with ourselves, it seems possible to find the reason why we should strive to be a gentle person, a kind and caring being. It is impossible to be completely compassionate unless we are willing to face the reality that is right in front of us. Without honesty, we will find that true compassion, caring and kindness are beyond our reach. Why should this be the case? Let us start by looking at the relative nature of the world around us.

Everything that is conditioned is subject to change. That is, everything that is conditioned possesses no inherently permanent characteristics. This includes the so-called "self"; it is also impermanent and does not exist by itself, if we investigate. However, the self does not quite believe this. The self is constantly working to declare its own permanence, its own separateness from the rest of the universe. It is constantly propagandizing on its own behalf, trying to cover things up, or reinterpret them or deny them, so that it can continue to remain central. In other words, in every instant, the ego has an agenda. It has standards. It wants to improve things. That's what it tells us, anyway: it wants to make things better. It sees a countryside, and imagines a house. Once the house has been attained, the ego begins to feel that the house is not quite right; it needs a special closet just for shoes, a high-speed coffeemaker, a six-car garage. The house is too close to the neighbor's house or too far from the lake, the rooms are too small, the kitchen too dark. This desire to improve things manifests in small ways and larger ways, but always, at the heart of this desire, is an absence of real honesty.

Real honesty means being willing to see things as they are, without having any motive or intention whatsoever to change them. Of course, this is difficult. It is counterintuitive. From the time of our birth we have divided the world into Us and

Everything Else, and have habitually pursued that which would advantage Us, leaving the Everything Else to fend for itself.

But where has this way of thinking got us? This constant denial of reality takes great energy. There is something unnatural about it. It does not make us happy, since reality is always refusing to cooperate, refusing to corroborate our propaganda. Even if we finally get what we want, we fear that we will lose it again, and this brings us anxiety. And every moment we feel this sadness, this frustration, this inability to make the world fit our ego's projection. In the end, at the time of our death, we will have to deal once and for all with the lie of our own permanence.

True honesty also means relating to each moment completely. When you are dishonest, you miss this moment because you are

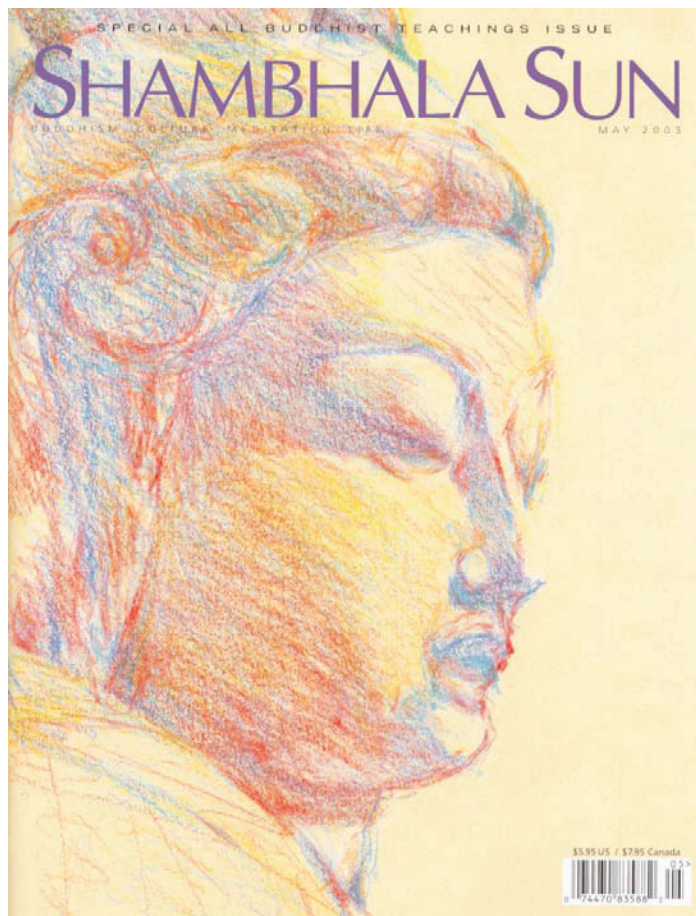
thinking of the next moment, or the last moment or next week's moments. And therefore you are failing to relate to this moment, to the reality that is right in front of you. By not paying total attention to this moment, you are disrespecting this thought, this energy, taking this moment for granted. Now, when we ignore the present moment in this way, there are consequences: we create karma, we create suffering. If we live this moment only fifty percent, the fifty percent we failed to live will surely cause us difficulties later.

So when we say "be mindful" in this tradition, we are simply saying: this moment is more profound than anything else on earth. We are saying: your innate nature is primordially pure, and therefore the energy that comes out of your primordially pure nature is more valid than anything else.

This moment is no less valid

than any other moment. Whether this moment consists of you thinking of your father, or hearing a flock of geese overhead, or feeling irritated because you've just remembered that tax time is approaching, or experiencing an itch on the back of your neck-whatever it is-nothing is more valid than this moment, because what is present in this moment is nothing less than the pure energy of the primordially pure state of your being.

Say you experience a moment of jealousy. Being honest means that you must not disregard that jealous feeling. You must be completely aware of your jealousy, and of the fact that this jealousy is simply an energy. This energy is every bit as much "you" as any other energy that has ever been "you" or has



emanated from "you." And since this jealous energy is as valid as any other energy, you must respect the jealous energy fully. You must pay complete attention to it. You must not ignore it, or theorize about it or be negative towards it-you must simply pay complete attention to it.

When you pay complete attention in this way, the energy won't demand anything more from you. It will be totally satisfied by the fact that you have paid attention. It will be complete. It will not cry, it will not demand any more attention, it will not ruin the day. Having been fully experienced, it will simply continue, unobstructedly, as energy.

So in a sense, jealousy-or any feeling we experience-is like a snake that has tied itself into a knot. If we respect the snake, if we are honest with the snake, if we recognize the innate ability of the snake, if we have confidence in the snake's ability to untie itself, then we don't need to do anything, except to be completely present in that moment. And we will see, within that moment, that the snake will untie itself.

The energy of jealousy is no different from the energy associated with the pleasure of eating, or the stab of a pin, or the feel of rain on the skin or the sound of music from across a lake. These are all just energies in a continuum of energies, if the awareness is present. Fully experiencing this continuum is the practice of real honesty.

Honesty, then, means: no fabrication, no pretense, no foolishness. Honesty means: true sensitivity, true understanding. Honesty means: be simple. Realize that you can live with very little-very few ideas, very few possessions. Having very little, you will feel less inclined to make yourself busy; you will be less dependent and will therefore have more time to be free and relaxed.

Look, you can never be totally, completely honest, unless you know the full picture of everything. Those who are the most honest have complete confidence in the total function of reality-like the Buddha himself. Then you do not find any harm outside, since you have subjugated the real demon within, namely dishonesty.

Not being honest creates identity. Not being honest generates selfishness. Not being honest prevents us from living fully. When we are not being honest, we worry: if I do this, what is in it for me, what will happen to me, and so forth. The "me" becomes important, instead of the moment.

Letting the moment take over is the practice of great honesty. To let the moment take over, you have to have great confidence in your true nature: the Buddha within you. When you find the Buddha within, everything is celebration. You will be able to see everything outside of yourself as the expression of the Buddha within. If something appears wrathful, it is understood as the expression of the Buddha within. If something appears peaceful, it is understood as the expression of the Buddha within. After all, everything is the expression of the Buddha within. Therefore everything is your creation. Your creation is everything. When you understand in this way, you will feel no need to be dishonest. You will feel no need to fight, no need to change. You will be able to relate to things just as they are.

Now, we may ask: doesn't this condemn us to a life of passivity? Since everything is perfect just as it is, does this mean we must sit and watch life go by? Actually this is not the case.

Being honest, in this context, means that we are able to see things just as they are. Therefore, any action we take will be informed by true sight. It will be based on truth, not on delusional or wishful thinking. It will not be biased by our concepts. Our actions, in turn, will have a natural honesty. We will not act wastefully, or unnecessarily or out of impure intention.

If you have been on a car trip in the summer, then you are familiar with the heat waves that shimmer up from the road. Do these heat waves serve any useful purpose? All they do is obscure the real conditions ahead of you. These heat waves may be likened to dishonesty. As we reduce or eliminate these waves, we see the road more clearly, in all its danger and all its beauty. In the same way, as we become more honest, we experience life more fully. Seeing reality just as it is-not judging it, categorizing it or trying to change it-we are able to respond more completely, more compassionately and more effectively to whatever arises. We are open to the beauty of life and the desolation of life, to the humor, to the tragedy-to everything.

After all, what is so scary about things just as they are? If we see things as they are, at least we know the truth. What should frighten us is denying things as they are. Because no matter what we may think, they still are as they are. Reality still exists in front of us. When we deny reality, we are like someone who is thinking of jumping across a river but refusing to look at it. We can wish all we like, and project all we like, and deny all we like, but the river is still exactly as wide as it is. So it makes sense to open our eyes, to see and accept the river as it is. Then we can jump (or not jump) with full knowledge of what we are doing, accepting total responsibility for the consequences, whatever they may be.

Here we might very well see the birth of complete intelligence, an intelligence that frees us from all consequences. This is what is required to live fearlessly. We do not become fearless because we know that nothing bad will ever happen to us, or that we will never experience a negative emotion or feel discomfort. True fearlessness comes from the knowledge that we will never lie to ourselves, that we will never evade a single moment of our lives. We will be fully present for every moment and every consequence.

Now, this sort of honesty is partly willed. That is, we say to ourselves: Look, try to be more honest. Or: Try not to over-conceptualize, try not to delude yourself, try to look frankly at this situation, really consider the possibility that you are mistaken. But more importantly, the honesty we are talking about is the natural by-product of a disciplined and energetic meditation practice. That is to say, honesty springs forth naturally from meditation, without willing it at all. If we meditate, we will become more honest. This practice of honesty-which may at first sound harrowing and difficult-is in fact the only way to fully enjoy our lives, and be who we truly are. ♦

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