

## Purity of Heart

### Yamakavagga: Pairs - The Buddha: Pali Canon

Phenomena are preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.  
If you speak or act with a corrupted heart,  
then suffering follows you as the wheel of the cart,  
the track of the ox that pulls it.

Phenomena are preceded by the heart,  
ruled by the heart,  
made of the heart.  
If you speak or act with a calm, bright heart,  
then happiness follows you like a shadow  
that never leaves.

'He insulted me,  
hit me,  
beat me,  
robbed me'  
for those who brood on this, hostility isn't stilled.

'He insulted me,  
hit me,  
beat me,  
robbed me' —  
for those who don't brood on this, hostility is stilled.

Hostilities aren't stilled through further hostility.  
Hostilities are stilled through non-hostility.  
this is an unending truth.

Unlike those who don't realize that we are all here on  
the for a very short time,  
those who do realize this—their quarrels are stilled.

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### Purity of Heart - Thanissaro Bhikkhu

During my first weeks with my teacher, Ajaan Fuang, I began to realize that he had psychic powers. He never made a show of them, but I gradually sensed that he could read my mind and anticipate future events. I became intrigued: What else did he know? How did he know it? He must have detected where my thoughts were going, for one evening he gently headed me off: "You know," he said, "the whole aim of our practice is purity of heart. Everything else is just games."

That one phrase — purity of heart — more than intrigued me. It reverberated deep down inside. I prompted me to recalled the philosopher Kierkegaard and his dictum: "*Purity of heart is to will one thing.*" I didn't agree with Kierkegaard as to what that "one thing" was, but I did agree that purity of heart is the most important treasure of life. And here Ajaan Fuang was offering to teach me how to develop it. That's one of the reasons why I stayed with him until he died.

His basic definition of purity of heart was simple enough—"a *happiness that will never harm anyone*". But a happiness like that is hard to find, for ordinary happiness requires that we eat. In my practice one of the first training questions was "What is a being? To begin with, all beings subsist on food." This is how the Buddha introduced the topic of causality to young people: The primary causal relationship isn't something gentle like light reflecting off mirrors, or jewels illuminating jewels. It's feeding. We feed in many ways. We feed our senses, feed our ego, feed our desires. But we can begin by thinking of feeding our bodies. Our bodies need physical food for their well-being. Our minds need the food of pleasant sensory contacts, intentions, and consciousness itself in order to function. If you ever want proof that interconnectedness isn't always something to celebrate, just contemplate how the beings of the world feed on one another, physically and emotionally. Interbeing is inter-eating. As Ajaan

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Suwat, my second teacher once said,

*“If there were a god who could arrange that by my eating I could make everyone in the world full, I’d bow down to that god.”*

But that’s not how feeding works.

We’re so compelled to feed that we blind ourselves to its larger impact. Our first pleasure, after the shock of being born, was getting to feed.

But when you go to a quiet, secluded place and start examining your life, you begin to see what an enormous issue it is just to keep the body and mind fed.

On the one hand, you may think that any suffering caused to others is unavoidable as you fulfill your need. Or you may see something even more dismaying: the emotions that arise within you when you don’t feel that your body and mind are getting enough fuel. You realize that as long as your source of physical or mental food is unreliable, you’re unreliable, too. You may be able to see the connection explaining why even good people can reach a point where they’re capable of murder, deceit, adultery, or theft.

Being born with this body means that we’re born with a huge bundle of obvious and not so obvious needs and desires that compel and can overwhelm our minds. This is where our practice of understanding and training our minds becomes the essential solution.

Fortunately, we human beings have the potential to civilize our continuous needs by learning to wean ourselves from our passion for the junk food of sights, sounds, smells, etc., and look instead for wholesome sustenance within our hearts. When we learn to appreciate the joy that comes from generosity, honor, compassion, and trust, we see that it’s much more fulfilling than the pleasure that comes simply from grabbing what we can for ourselves. We realize that our happiness is supported by non-harming.

Unfortunately, these qualities of the heart are conditional, for they depend on a tender web of beliefs and feelings — belief in justice and the basic goodness of human nature, feelings of trust and affection. When that web breaks, as it so easily can, the heart can turn vicious. We see this in divorce,

broken families, and society at large. When the security of our food source — the basis of our mental and material well-being — gets threatened, the finer qualities of the mind can vanish. People who believe in kindness can suddenly seek revenge. Those who espouse non-violence can suddenly call for war. And those who rule by divisiveness — by making a mockery of compassion, prudence, and our common humanity — find a willing following for their law-of-the-jungle agenda.

The unconditional happiness—one’s unwavering source of wisdom and compassion comes from “the knowledge and vision of things as they truly are”. This unconditioned happiness can guarantee the purity of your behavior— purity of heart. Independent of space and time, it’s beyond conditions. No one can threaten its food source, for it has no need to feed. When you’ve had even just a glimpse of this happiness, your belief in goodness becomes unshakable. Other people can trust you, and you can genuinely trust yourself.

You lack for nothing.

Purity of heart is to know this one thing.

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Consider all phenomena  
to be conditioned & impermanent.

Be grateful to everyone and everything.

Let the middle way/heart center be your refuge.

Let go of brooding over others faults.

Be curious about all phenomena.

At all times rely on a joyful heart.

Don’t expect a standing ovation.

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