

A Closed Heart is Suffering

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In our daily life, one of the most important aspects of Buddhist training is to try to keep our heart open and not to let it harden. This can be difficult, and the effort involves constant diligence. If we harden our heart, we dam up the flow of unconditional love. Then we are not acting from our place of true refuge: the Eternal. The Water of the Spirit gets blocked, which causes us to suffer.

Our training provides us with spiritual tools to work on keeping our heart open and the Water of the Spirit flowing. In pure meditation we learn to let go of the thoughts and emotions that cause suffering. The merits of this spiritual effort carry over into everything we do.

The deeper purpose of the Precepts is to help us avoid blocking the flow of Compassion in the midst of the difficulties of our daily lives. Especially helpful are the Precepts: “Do not speak or think against others;” “Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others;” and “Do not be angry.”

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation in which we must remonstrate with others. How do we keep an open heart in such situations? There used to be a TV show called *Dragnet*. There were two detectives who would interview folks who were often emotionally distressed. In pretty much every episode they would calm them down by saying, “Just the facts, please.” This would bring the person being interviewed back to reality. Similarly, in remonstrating, it is helpful to restrict oneself to the calm and respectful presentation of the facts that are relevant to the problem being addressed.

I would like to end with a teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha from twenty-five hundred years ago. It is from *The Scripture of the Buddha’s Last Teaching* (found in *Buddhist Writings*):

If someone would come to dismember your every joint, you should pacify your Heart, not glare angrily or hatefully at the person, guard your mouth and refrain from spouting hot words of hate. If you indulge in a raging or resentful heart then you make yourself an obstacle in your own path and lose the benefits of your merit and virtue; forbear for virtue’s sake and keep to the Precepts for, if you act in this way, you reach what seems impossible.