

THE RIVER OF LIFE

By Vichitr Ratna Dhiravamsa

We must let things within us flow, as they naturally should do, and not try to restrict or obstruct this flow. Life is always in a state of flux. It is not something static, but must flow like a river. Imagine a river: it never stops for a second; it runs on and on. The Buddha used to compare life to a mountain river which starts in a very narrow place and runs into a wider and deeper course until it reaches the ocean. It is only when it gets to the sea that it stops flowing completely, because there is nowhere further for it to run.

What about life? Can it stop flowing? Life itself cannot cease to flow, but must flow ever more widely and deeply. We cannot become shallower and narrower in our lives, but have to move with life into experiences both deeper and wider. We then begin to encounter what is extra-ordinary and wonderful within each of us. Perhaps in our journey we come across things that are undesirable, appalling, even destructive, but there is also the possibility of encountering and experiencing wonderful things. However, if we are wise we shall recognise that any aspect of life, whether enjoyable or painful, beautiful or ugly, can bring wisdom if we know how to learn from our experiences. Some people appear not to learn from life. This is because they lack patient observation. Their minds are too concerned with achievements and results from their actions while neglecting the present. The mind cannot therefore correct its own actions, but wants to escape from what it is doing, thus creating difficulties. Do not look for success in your work, just do your best and then the work will be done as well as possible at that stage. You should always do your best, caring not for the result but for the action, the doing. People in general suppose that everybody cares for his work. In fact, work is usually done for its result, which is normally money. Under conditions where people do not really enjoy their work but have to make their living through it, they do not give their full attention to their work. Resistance to work which is disliked but is at the same time unavoidable leads to inner conflict. There is a division between what you are and what you are doing. You may want to be something, but do not have the capacity to do so. The situation sets up frustration, and causes tension within the mind and in society. This is one of the causes of mental ill health in the community. But if we are strong enough to confront anything in life, we can give our whole attention to what arises and everything then becomes easier. There are fewer obstacles and problems, and so life itself becomes the goal. If you wish to become one who is penniless, a wandering man, then you have to give your whole heart to that kind of life. You do not care about anything else. You must not expect good things in that life, or in any life, but be prepared to face both

unhappiness and happiness, trouble as well as comfort, in all living. There is no mystery in living. We live because we accept life, not as a part of things or part of a whole, but as the whole itself. Life is everything. In Buddhism, the Buddha gave it only one word: *dukkha*, which embraces both suffering and happiness, pleasure and pain, sorrow and joy, negative as well as positive, constructive as well as destructive aspects. All are included in life. So when you experience difficulties, you must not think that you are an unfortunate person to be born into this life and try and deal with your problems with a dull mind, accepting them as *kamma* without looking into their cause. This leads to further weakness, because there is no detached awareness. We have to be prepared to face all our experiences, whether desirable or undesirable, otherwise we shall never “cross to the other shore.” We have to face all aspects of living first.

So when you experience troubles, you should regard this as fortunate – as an opportunity for developing your spiritual life. When situations and circumstances are used as instruments for spiritual training, you are a lucky person. But if you do not know how to benefit from so-called unfortunate situations, you will suffer and perhaps be overcome. We become fixed and unable to flow into the depths of our being by stumbling over obstacles. What holds us back? We have to find out.

The “practice” of life will be changed only if the inner discovery makes progress – otherwise we conform to the same patterns and continually use the same approach without discovering fresh ones. Yet our situations are constantly changing and flowing. When we watch a river, we see that the water changes all the time – it is never the same. You may say that you cross the same river back in the evening, but you have not crossed the same water. Life in the morning is one scene, but later there is another, and later still yet another. It is never the same, although it is similar because of continuity. When we cannot see the continuity of things, but just the physical body or the old present state of mind, we cannot see what is ever new within us.

You may have observed yourself being very happy or excited, or sometimes sad or angry. But in this changing, there is a basis for change. Everything may change while you remain stable, in equilibrium, during your journey through life. Without understanding the nature of this basis you become the victim of change and cannot help suffering from circumstances. You react like a machine. A person who cannot remain aware within the situations he comes across becomes like a robot, conforming to old patterns, taken over by circumstances, a victim of life. So we have to become aware of our life – processes so as to see why it is that we cannot help doing this or that. There must be something within us preventing us from controlling our activities and behaviour. We therefore feel insecurity and failure in life, which causes

suffering and problems. There is a basic guilt in not being able to do what we think should be done.

We have to discover the main cause of our difficulties, of not being able to do what we should do. Intellectually we may be able to understand it, but to be free from it is much harder. The cause is desire, supported by ignorance. We cannot of course give up all desires in living, for without them we cannot survive. Desire is a form of energy without which life could not exist with its ebb and flow. Shall we blame desire for our difficulties, or has it something beneficial for us? If we regard desire as a form of energy we find that it does not bring energy only, but problems in life depending upon the way we spend its energy. If it is directed towards the right aim, it will be useful. If the energy of desire is not directed towards extremes but towards the understanding of what we do and want, then it will be helpful. In Pali there is the Buddhist term, "*Nirodhatanha*," the desire for Nibbana. This form of desire wishes to see what Nibbana is, and it is a very powerful form of energy through which the whole being is directed towards realising Nibbana, whether or not there is Nibbana. There is no prior belief in it. When we work with this form of desire, we shall be able to see Nibbana, the Ultimate Reality. So we note that not all desire is "wrong". But if the energy of desire is directed towards something in which we always indulge or become confused, it will not help us. If not used rightly, it becomes dangerous. If you think of desire as energy, you must take care of it, arousing and nourishing it in the right way. Then it will be your helper, and your life can flow towards the depth of being, where you will find that which is beyond words.

But first of all, we must not hold the notion that there is something there, otherwise our wisdom will not be strong enough to penetrate to the ultimate truth. If we put aside beliefs and knowledge that we have, leaving them alone and going on alone, we shall not be held back. We shall be neither pushed or pulled, but shall travel freely towards, the treasure at the depth of our being. This cannot be given to us by anyone, and neither can it be stored away. It is there, but "there" is not a place. It is also everywhere, but essentially within you. What is the means of discovering this extraordinary treasure within us? Do we need a path to it? Someone may say there is no path, but to me there must be. The way is the journey itself. In fact, it cannot be separated from the "going into".

The treasure itself can be contacted, but not by the ordinary senses only by something extraordinary. If we are totally aware, we can realise it at least for a short moment, because there is perfect clarity. Clarity can be imagined figuratively as light. That is why the Buddha said that when we have come into "contact" with reality "light has arisen", vision has arisen, which has not been

created by the mind. It is real vision, without any bias or conditions, and it is spontaneous, without premeditation.

This is not something beyond the reach of our ability. It is not nonsensical, but has meaning when we enter into it. Every aspect of life will flow into it, leading to the ultimate cessation of flux. Some people may call 'it', but this concept concerns eternal time, whereas Nibbana is timeless. In that wholeness of being there is no "time". You can experience a timeless state when you give your whole being to something and there is no thought of time. You are it.

What is time? Time comes only when there is thinking. Time is the thought-moment. So if we watch our thought-power very keenly, we can notice the gap after each thought, which is a silent state. You may experience the silence between the words when listen to me speaking during which something springs up. This is the understanding which cannot come together with thoughts but occurs within silent moments between thoughts. We usually do not notice this in our lives, but there is silence, or "space" in everything, not only in matter but in the mind. In meditation one must be able to notice the space within the mind, between thoughts, so that one can experience the silent moments. You may ask whether in silence there is anything, or if it is completely blank. There is something, and it is very important. According to ordinary perception there is a blank, but in deep perception you will discover what is there.

The Friendly Way.

