

THE 38 WAYS TO HAPPINESS
THE 1ST WAY DO NOT ASSOCIATE WITH FOOLS

In the Mangala Sutta, although all of the Units are important, if you cannot master the first unit, none of the thirty eight which follow can be started upon. Thus you could say that of all the Units the first one is the most important like the first step on the staircase. If you cannot master this first step, you will spend the rest of your life at the foot of the staircase with know way of getting into the house. Everyone wants a successful life: how come some fail?

Everyone born into the world has the greatest of intentions to live a decent life no-one wants to make a mess of their lives. Even a criminal doesn't particularly want to live his life dishonestly, but he thinks that being a criminal is good enough it's a good shortcut in earning one's living ; thus why not be a criminal. Having become a criminal. it is only later that he finds out that being a criminal is no good, but by then it's too late : he can't change his mind or his life and ends up being a criminal for the rest of his life. Thus you can conclude that although everyone would like to be good, not everyone manages to live out their wishes.

The point of this observation is to illustrate that although everyone has the best of intentions, not all people see their good intentions through to fruition. There are many factors which cause this to be the case for example: physical handicap or lacking sufficient knowledge. The reasons are too numerous to mention here ; however, the most damaging of obstacles to success is the lack of discretion or judgment in situations that require decisions. What this means is not being able to tell the difference between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in any situation. When someone is unable to discriminate between good and evil, the end result is misunderstanding ; seeing bad things as good, seeing wrongdoing as just, seeing inappropriate behaviour as appropriate. With such an understanding, a person can easily justify doing evil and thus makes a mess of his whole life.

On the contrary, even if a person is physically lame or paralyzed, if he is possessed of discretion and can tell the difference between good and evil, he will be able to make some sort of success out of his life more so than many a person with bags of strength but no discretion. There are two major influences on the formation of discretion in a person. The first major influence is the example of those people we are closest to ; i.e.. our friends. If such friends influence us to make decision in the correct way, we can call them good friends (kalyanamitra). Such good friends run right from the lowest level to the highest ;and the Lord Buddha is the very highest of our good friends. After the Lord Buddha, the next in line are the arahants. After that, the Buddhist monastic Order or Sangha are the next in line. After the monastic order come our parents ; in the case that our parents own discretion is moral. After our parents come our teachers (in the case that our teachers' discretion is correct), and after that, come those of our friends who are good, our employers who are good, good people in history and the other good people in the world. As for faulty discretion, this comes from 'bad friends' (papamitta). such people can be called 'evil' or simply 'fools'. The other influence on our formation of discretion is ourselves. Even if you have been listening to advice for good or bad friends, you always give consideration to advice before getting down to following

the advice. If you have proper bases for your consideration, even given faulty data, you will have the common sense to see through the discrepancies and come out with the right decision required by the situation unlike the man with unreliable discretion, who even when given reliable data, will get the wrong end of the stick and make a faulty decision in any given situation.

Someone who has the ability to come to a correct assessment of any particular situation based on consideration of the information presented, is said to have *yoniso manasikara* ; i.e.. he gets the point. He asks the right questions of a given situation to get the information he needs to judge a situation or at least, when hearing someone else making a correct assessment of a particular situation, then he congratulates and appreciates them for their ability and is able to instill in themselves the same sort of ability.

The Lord Buddha was always very concerned for we, his disciples. This was the reason why he made the observation, "if you want to be successful in the future, you need to choose those with whom you associate because if you don't take care in choosing your friends, or cannot tell the difference between good and bad friends, when you come to associate with fools, you will pick up their bad habits and their faulty discretion and that will ruin our life for us. If however, we take care to choose good friends, we have a good chance of success in our future. Thus, the very first blessing which the Lord Buddha taught was, if you want to achieve success, don't associate with fools.

The definition of a fool

A fool is someone wicked, or weak, or feeble. For some fools, such a description might seem to be an understatement. Of course, a fool might be the proverbial giant punching sandbags, a frightening prospect for a rhinocerii, let alone a fragile human being. Thus, how come we use the term feeble for a fool? In order to answer this question, we have to examine the ways in which a person can be considered powerful. There are four different sources of power in the human being:

1. Physical Strength: different people are endowed with different degrees of physical strength. Anyone with plenty of muscles and no disabilities is endowed with the first storehouse of power.
2. Strength of Knowledge: derived from one's background of education and the experience of passing years. Having the ability to apply educated reasoning in useful subjects is the second storehouse of power.
3. Strength of Thought: Some people go through the same number of classes together. They have an equal amount of knowledge, but their ability to think through things using their knowledge may not be equal. Some people know so much, but it is of no use to them when they come to think things through. Someone may know how to mend an engine but sits idle all day long. Why don't they offer their services as a mechanic? Or earn their living in the engine business? Sitting around all day long, waiting for someone to come along and find work for them... . This we can blame on their having knowledge but not using the knowledge as part of their thinking. Thus, if anyone uses both their strength of knowledge and their strength of thought, they are at great advantage because they are endowed with the third storehouse of power.
4. Strength of virtue: When one has both the strength of thought and mindfulness of what one is doing, when one is using one's knowledge and thought to perform good service to oneself and others, one is endowed with the fourth storehouse of power: strength of virtue.

The human being has the potential to be endowed with all four storehouses of power: physical strength, strength of knowledge, strength of thought and strength of virtue.

Even if someone is endowed with all four of these storehouses of power, if their judgment is faulty, they will not be able to put their power to full use. If, for example, a foolish guy is physically strong, and may be qualified as a professor with a Ph.D., with plenty of knowledge, but without the ability to think properly, he applies his mastery of chemistry for dishonest purposes (e.g. distilling heroine). Thus even if you are endowed with some of the four powers, you can still be classified with the fools and those powers are not used to their full potential. At the most a fool can use only three of the storehouses of power. They can use only three of the four. Like a four-cylinder car in which only three of the spark plugs fire; it is of no use to anybody. If you have a four-cylinder car, all four need to work in order to get benefit from any one of the four. Thus, if you know your 'cylinders' are damaged, you don't need to wait until none of them are left firing before you go for mending!

In conclusion, when we define the meaning of a fool as someone weak, or feeble, we can see more clearly now that it means that they are weak or feeble in doing good deeds.

The reason for becoming a fool

Why, in spite of physical strength, knowledge, numerous degrees, the ability to think and read, does a person go back to thinking bad things, and translating them into bad actions; instead of ending up doing good deeds, they do evil deeds from morning to night. Even when asleep, they dream of the bad things they will do the next morning. The anger from the day is carried over into vengeful dreams at night.

If you look for the real origin of the factor which makes a person a fool, you can trace it back to one single reason that of the mind. The mind of a fool is never still. His mind dances back and forth, from object to object like a monkey. This is the sort of mind with no ability to concentrate. You might be in one place, but your mind is in another place completely, now in your home, now at the cinema ... The mind drifts off in every imaginable direction, now it is in London, but in an instant it is wandering round Hollywood or on the other side of the world in Tokyo. The mind roves all over the place, because it has no home to return to and lacks concentration. Thinking this and that, the mind is confused and clouded like someone continually stirring up the sediment in a bucket of water. The mind is thus never clear, and is irritated and vengeful weighed down, with sweat on one's brow as if bearing the burden of a mountain on one's back. Worse than this, when the mind is irritated like this, it cannot think straight and hence thinks only of bad things. Thus simply lacking concentration of the mind, is the reason for faulty judgment one thing follows another.

The Marks of a Fool

If a person's mind that cannot think straight, or is incoherent or for which judgment is faulty, just from time to time, that is nothing special. However, if this is the regular state of the mind, it will reduce the quality of the mind day by day, until the character of that person starts to take on the marks of a fool. i.e.:

1. Regularly thinking evil thoughts;
2. Regularly speaking evil words;

3. Regularly performing evil actions;

Thinking evil thoughts can be divided into three different types of damaging thought. The first (lobha) is to think day and night of stealing the things that belong to others. Seeing someone else's wife, his eyes light up thinking of when he can steal her away.

The second sort (payabat) of damaging thought is to think vengeful or aggressive thoughts. It takes only a minor conflict to stir such a person to vengefulness.

The third sort of damaging thinking is to have false views (miccha ditthi) i.e. they think wrong views about the world are right. To put it another way, their judgment is faulty.

Everyone makes mistakes. To make mistakes in a calculation or to do something in the wrong order or at the wrong time are not half so frightening as wrong view about morality. This is the most damaging sort of mistaken thought, because it causes our view of the world to be mistaken too. There are in all eight morally mistaken views about the world as follows:

1. That generosity is not virtuous and should not be done. If anyone really believes this, they destroy their own future right from the time they are born. Right from birth until maturity, a child relies on the generosity of his parents from the first milk he suckles from his mother. If he were not to be on the receiving end of generosity from the time he is born, he would have died long ago or if our relatives had not given us their time to look after us as we were growing up, by now we would probably have been run down by a passing car, or drowned, or been killed by contagious disease. Only because each relative gave his helping hand, that we could be nurtured to the present day, with food, clothing and knowledge.

At the very least, others have had the generosity to forgive us our wrongdoing. And when we are fully grown, only because of the generosity between husband and wife can both survive on a single salary.

Thus if anybody really believes that the world can turn without generosity, they are really denying, they completely deny all that we consider humane and they should certainly be avoided.

2. That it is unnecessary to honour people worthy of honour.

3. That it is unnecessary to be hospitable to the guests that come to our house. Such a belief is mistaken because when we accept that good judgment is something we can pick up from the people we associate with, if it happens that a good man visits our house, but we don't receive them properly, then we have no chance of improving upon our bad judgment. Thus we should never refuse virtuous guests.

4. That good and bad actions have no effect. Such people don't believe that doing good deeds will bring good results and that evil deeds will bring bad retribution.

5. That a child has no debt of gratitude to his parents. Sons or daughters with such a view end up thinking of their parents as no more than companions to keep them company, keeping them clothed and fed through their childhood. Such people who think that their parents ought to be thanking them for having been born, are not hard to find in this world.

6. That this world and the next don't really exist. Such people think that when you die that is the end of the story that there will be no afterlife and no rebirth. Some may say that they cannot answer such a question but at the very least you should not refute the existence of the afterlife. You should give the afterlife the benefit of the doubt, in order that you don't make a mess of your life.

7. That there is no such thing as being born instantly in fully grown form (Oppâtika). Beings born into the world are born in many different ways. Some are born from the womb, with a close connection with their parents. Some other sorts of beings are born in a different way, however, a sort of instant birth without the need to be brought up or develop through the immaturity of childhood. This is the method of birth of beings in the hell realms when beings are born into the hell realms, they become the denizens of hell instantly, without having to gradually grow up. They are born fully grown. Conversely, if you do a lot of good deeds during your life, when you pass away, your body is buried or cremated but the astral body of your mind is reborn instantly as a heavenly being, through the power of your past good deeds.

8. That monastics are able to purify themselves of all defilement. Such people believe that defilements are something just to be tolerated because they cannot be washed away. They think that monastics are just the same as themselves; i.e. completely defiled. They think that there is no way to develop your own virtue, and so do not even try to make the effort.

All eight of these false views are so damaging to your way of thinking that even the most powerful of saints could not do anything to help them.