Readings, Reflections and Practices for Week 6

Right Effort

Suggested Sitting Meditation Focus this week

Aware of my whole body I breathe in

Aware of my whole body I breathe out.

*During sitting meditation this week, practice to be aware of the ever changing sensations in your body.

Readings:

Like fine-tuning a musical instrument

As Ven Sona was meditating in seclusion [after doing walking meditation until the skin of his soles was split & bleeding], this train of thought arose in his awareness: "Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their effort, I am one, but my mind is not liberated. Now, my family has enough money that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make merit at the same time. What if I were to give up monastic training, return to the lay life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?"

Then the Blessed One, as soon as he perceived with his awareness the train of thought in Ven. Sona's mind [traveled] from Vulture Peak Mountain, appeared in the Cool Wood right in front of Ven. Sona, and sat down. Ven. Sona, after bowing down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, the Blessed One said to him, "Sona, as you were meditating in seclusion, didn't this train of thought appear to your awareness Of the Blessed One's disciples who have aroused their effort, I am one, but my mind is not liberated. Now, my family has enough money that it would be possible to enjoy wealth & make merit at the same time. What if I were to give up monastic training, return to the lay life, enjoy wealth, & make merit?"

"Yes, world honored one."

"Now what do you think, Sona. Before, when you were a house-dweller, were you skilled at playing the vina?" (a traditional stringed instrument)

"Yes, world honored one."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too tight, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, world honored one."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were too loose, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"No, world honored one."

"And what do you think: when the strings of your vina were neither too tight nor too loose, but tuned (lit: 'established') to be right on pitch, was your vina in tune & playable?"

"Of course, world honored one."

"In the same way, Sona, over-aroused effort leads to restlessness, overly slack effort leads to laziness. Thus you should determine the right pitch for your effort, attune ('penetrate,' 'ferret out') the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there pick up your theme."

"Yes, world honored one," Ven. Sona answered the Blessed One. Then, having given this teaching to Ven. Sona, the Blessed One left the Cool Wood and returned to Vulture Peak Mountain.

So after that, Ven. Sona practiced to determine the right pitch for his effort, attuned the pitch of the [five] faculties [to that], and there picked up his theme. Dwelling alone, secluded, mindful, ardent, & resolute, in no long time he achieved liberation— Anguttara Nikaya 6.55

Utthana Sutta: On Vigilance (Sutta Nipata 2.10)

Adapted from the Pali translation by John D. Ireland

"Rouse yourself! Sit up! What good is there in sleeping? For those afflicted by the dis-ease of suffering, and struck by the arrow of craving- running after this and that-, what sleep is there?

"Rouse yourself! Sit up! Resolutely train yourself to attain peace. Do not let the king of death, seeing you are careless, lead you astray and dominate you.

"Go beyond this clinging to the fleeting pleasures of the senses, Do not waste your precious opportunity. When this precious opportunity has passed you will sorrow.

Questions for Reflection.

1) What things are easy for me to put effort into? What practices do I find easy and flowing- which ones do I find more difficult? Why do I think that is?
2) Have I had any experience with tuning the string? Do I keep it at the same tightness all the time, or do I adjust it? Do I adjust it in different situations or with different people?
3) What hindrances do I notice to in my practice? Are there “themes” that keep arising for me? What strategies might be useful for me?

Suggested Practices

1) This week- notice where your attention goes- where your train of thought goes in daily life. Reflect and see how much of our thinking and action is in alignment with your aspiration.
2) Cultivate a committed daily practice- whether it be ten minutes or an hour of sitting meditation, or walking meditation or driving the car meditation. Choose something and commit to it