***16 August 2021***

***The Tenth Vow - Neither Acquisitiveness nor Craving
\* Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, beings in my Pure Land should have the least sense of property, even in regard to their own bodies or their very selves or if they should give rise to thoughts and feelings associated with craving for objects of desire.***

In the *Brahmana Sutta: To Unnabha the Brahman,*(Samyutta Nikaya 51.15) Ananda gives a teaching to Unnabha about abandoning desire.

*"Is there a path, is there a practice, for the abandoning of that desire?"*

*"Yes, there is a path, there is a practice, for the abandoning of that desire."*

*"What is the path, the practice, for the abandoning of that desire?"*

*"Brahman, there is the case where a monk develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on desire & the fabrications of exertion. He develops the base of power endowed with concentration founded on persistence... concentration founded on intent... concentration founded on discrimination & the fabrications of exertion. This, Brahman, is the path, this is the practice for the abandoning of that desire."*

*"If that's so, Master Ananda, then it's an endless path, and not one with an end, for it's impossible that one could abandon desire by means of desire."*

Ananda, who is staying in Kosambi, at Ghosita's Park, asks Unnabha about his journey to see him in the park. He uses Unnabha’s own experience of desire to show him how this is possible. First he checked whether Unnabha desired to go to the park, then he checked if he intended to fulfil this desire, then he checked whether he persisted in thinking about going to the park. Unnabha agrees that this is the case.

Ananda then checks whether Unnabha’s desire, intent, and persistence stopped when he arrived at the park. Once again, Unnabha concurs and is overjoyed by the fact that this Dharmic path starts with desire and does indeed have an end.

What Ananda is teaching in this sutra is fundamental to understanding how to live and die as Buddhists. He is not teaching the end of craving by not craving. He is not teaching that craving leads to suffering, but instead, to use our desire, our craving, as a way to concentrate our mind and exert ourselves to obtain an object that satisfies our hunger and quenches our thirst.

The key is to select objects of desire that are wholesome and healthy. Similarly, if our body craves food, then we should feed it healthy, wholesome, nutritious food.

In the Pure Land tradition, our spiritual object of desire is Amida Buddha. Amida is infinite and immeasurable. Amida can be found in everyday things, simple things, and can be enjoyed on a daily basis. We can wake up each day with desire and end each day feeling content and satisfied. Sometimes our desire can be fulfilled by formal practices like chanting the nembutsu, or sitting in quiet meditation, and other times, by informal practices like being in nature, watching the sunset, or simply enjoying a cup of tea with a friend and so on.

As long as we are human, we will experience a lack that will lead to a want. Craving covers a vast range of subtle feelings, from wanting, longing, hoping, wishing, praying, or desiring to more physical forms like hunger and thirst.  As Ananda has taught, it is not the fact that we crave that makes the path endless and impossible, but the objects we crave. To not crave is to be in denial that we are physical and spiritual beings that have basic needs.

It might sound easier to live without craving. It might even feel better to be detached. But in detachment comes a coldness that is far from caring and compassionate. By preventing ourselves to desire human contact might starve ourselves from meaningful connections, including love and joy. Ending craving might save us from the painful disappointment that comes when the ideal meets the actual but equally, detachment just might be the cause and condition to a closed heart and mind.

Whether we crave or not, will not change the fact that all conditioned things are impermanent and lead to suffering. To desire is to feel love with one’s heart.  To know that we, or our beloved will die, makes our time with our loved ones even more precious. It might give rise to joy or *mudita*for all the wonderful things that others have and love*.*But to love is also to experience sadness that comes when things change or end. It is at this time when learning to love means learning how to let go. To let go means to change. And change usually comes when we are open and willing to die.

Even at the point of death, our desire to cling to our bodies might also be a symptom of detachment. If we have learned not to become attached then we might have also learned not to care about what happens at the point of death. If we don’t have a desire to be reborn in a Pure Land, or even to enter into nirvana then we are closing our hearts and minds to the possibility of being liberated. With detachment, might also come a fear of letting go of what we know, especially when what we know is to be embodied in a physical form.

In dying, it is especially important to let go of our body, and to desire to go forth into the unknown chapter of our lives that lie ahead of us with an open heart and mind.

Buddhist funerals are full of rites and passages to help liberate even the most clingiest of us all. We start with the ritual of closing all the doors and gates to all the objects of temptation and desire for this world and this body. We chant *Om kara jiva sabaha*not just to close the gates to hell, but also the sense doors of the human body. This is because the spirit needs to be free of the physical body. Once the gates are all closed then another ritual of calling out to the spirit is performed. The priest calls out in a loud voice to the spirit of the deceased, not to be scared and to go toward a bright and dazzling light. With doors and gates safely closed, and with the support and encouragement from friends and family, even those who fear and tremble at leaving this realm will find that their spirit becomes liberated.