

QUOTES FROM CHAPTER 4 SENSE DESIRE

It is said that practicing mindfulness is easy; remembering to do so is difficult. To help us remember, it is useful to have a clear understanding of the forces in our minds that contribute to our forgetting. The one the Buddhist tradition focuses on most is desire.

Desire is ubiquitous in human life—living without wants, wishes, motivations, or aspirations is impossible. Buddhism emphasizes skillful desire and distinguishing the healthy, useful desires from the unhealthy ones. Rather than being anti-desire, Buddhism focuses on overcoming the desires that bring suffering while at the same time encouraging us to act on those leading to liberation and compassion.

Some desires benefit our world and ourselves, other desires cause harm, sometimes tremendous harm. An important aspect of the path to the ending of suffering is becoming wise about harmful desires. This is not easy when desires operate in a way that mask the suffering they cause.

Even when the desire is healthy and useful, the ways in which we act on the desire may not be.

Any desire, healthy or unhealthy can manifest as a compulsion. Wherever there is a compulsion, we are not free. In the West, we sometimes call particularly strong desires addictions. In Buddhism these are called cravings, clinging, or thirsts.

Because desire has such an important role in human life, we need to understand its nature, dangers, opportunities, and workings. For this purpose, it is helpful to notice the difference between simple desire, and the tension associated with craving. It can also be useful to notice how preoccupation with any desire contributes to an alienation from ourselves, from the present moment, and even from others. People caught in the web of desire often live on the surface of life.

We can study what we desire. What is it exactly that we want? Is it the object of desire we really want or is it something we hope attaining the desire will provide. What will be the consequence of getting what we want?

A second way to investigate the desire is to look carefully and inquire what is underneath the desire, what fuels it? What are the motivations that are being manifested by the desire? For example, certain media messages, advertisements especially, can promote a sense of lack and then a desire to fill that void.

Once we understand undesirable desire well enough it is useful to discover how to be free of it. While not all desires should be let go, it is important to have the ability to let of all of them.