

Handout for the Worldly Winds Course - December 2020
Pair 4: Fame and Ill-repute (or high and low status)

Overview

We now conclude our study of The Eight Worldly Winds, four pairs of typical ways the mind interprets and reacts to our experience. This month we looked at the last pair, translated variously as Fame and Ill-repute or disgrace, or sometimes as high and low status, or good or bad reputation.

David started us off with a guided meditation on Awareness, a mental factor that is essential in working with all the winds.

Since it was our last class, we also reviewed the factor of Equanimity in the Buddha's teachings. This is the quality of a balanced mind, steady heart and grounded, centered bodily energy that counteracts the tendencies to get swept away by these "winds". Here are two references for further study of this factor:

- From Gil:

<https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/equanimity/>

- Ajahn Sucitto's final chapter called "*Evenness of Mind*" in his *Paramis* book (whole book highly recommended!):

<https://forestsangha.org/teachings/books/parami-ways-to-cross-life-s-floods?language=English>

Due to internet issues, Jennifer was unable to share her thoughts in class, so we include below a written version of her planned talk on the pair of Fame and Ill-repute. Our usual selection of quotes from the Suttas is included within her piece.

As usual, there are some reflections for you to contemplate at the end.

On Fame and Ill-repute (from Jennifer)

What we are talking about relative to this pair? In general, this pair addresses our relationship to how society or groups of people view or perceive us. This is the general spirit of the inquiry into this pair. **Use the names/words that are most helpful to you understand this teaching.**

As we discussed in class, high status and low status is not the problem, rather it is our relationship and response to these winds that we want to investigate and be mindful of. The questions that are helpful to reflect on include: how can we relate to these winds more lightly, more wisely, with equanimity and balance? What is the wholesome, middle way, relationship to these human tendencies?

Based on the Suttas, it seems the Buddha had a wholesome relationship to this pair. The Buddha was famous in his own way as he was perceived by many as a wise and compassionate human being. People from all over came to see him including kings, military leaders and very wealthy individuals. But, the Buddha was not focused on his own popularity or high status, rather he was focused on teaching the Dharma. Another person that comes to mind is the Dalai Lama. He also uses his fame or high status to educate and promote non-violence and compassion.

Now, let's review what the Buddha said about the Worldly Winds specifically what happens when an untrained person gets caught by the winds (modified to include this pair of winds only).

"He does not reflect, 'Disgrace has arisen for me. It is **inconstant**, stressful, & **subject to change**.' **He does not discern it as it actually is.**

"His **mind remains consumed with the status...** the disgrace... He welcomes the arisen status and rebels against the arisen disgrace.

As he is thus engaged in welcoming & rebelling, he is not released from birth, aging, or death; from sorrows, lamentations, pains, distresses, or despairs. He is not released, I tell you, from **suffering & stress."**

AN 8.6 Lokavipatti Sutta: The Failings of the World translated from the Pali by, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, © 1997

This sutta quote reminds us of the suffering in welcoming high status and repelling low status. When someone has high status (or fame), they often have many followers, advocates, supporters, and friends. With this higher than average social capital, comes power, influence, access to resources, financial wealth and privileges. Although this high status can be pleasant, there also is much suffering in trying to hold onto this high status as well as trying to get more of it. **This is also known as Greed, one of the three poisons.**

As greed of this high status wind intensifies and is taken to an extreme, it manifests as a greed for power OVER others, resulting in oppression, racism, and harming of all kinds against targeted groups of people. This is an important point to name and acknowledge.

Now to be clear, there is nothing wrong with feeling good about our wholesome actions, and it is healthy to feel remorse about something we did that caused harm (which can result in disgrace/bad reputation). However, there is suffering in our grasping onto high status and repelling low status. The suffering of greed arises, the suffering of wanting and repelling arises, the suffering of delusion arises, the suffering of conceit arises, the suffering of comparing mind arises.

These two activities of conceiting and comparing mind are often present when caught by this pair of winds. Below is a quote from the Buddha, about conceit, followed by a quote about the suffering of comparing mind.

Conceit:

"'I am' is an act of conceit. 'I am this' is an act of conceit. 'I shall be' is an act of conceit. 'I shall not be'... 'I shall be possessed of form'... 'I shall not be possessed of form'... 'I shall be percipient'... 'I shall not be percipient'... 'I shall be neither percipient nor non-percipient' is an act of conceit. An act of conceit is a disease, an act of conceit is a cancer, an act of conceit is an arrow. Therefore, monks, you should train yourselves: 'We will dwell with an awareness free of acts of conceit.'"

Yavakalapi Sutta: The Sheaf of Barley, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, © 1998

Comparing Mind:

"If one regards himself superior or equal or inferior by reason of the body that is impermanent, painful and subject to change, what else is it than not seeing reality? Or if one regards himself superior or equal or inferior by reason of feelings, perceptions, volitions or consciousness, what else is it than not seeing reality? If one does not regard himself superior or equal or inferior by reason of the body, the feelings, perceptions, volitions or consciousness what else is it than seeing reality? SN 22.49

One of the ways to practice with the suffering of conceit is to remind ourselves of the 'not self' aspect of it. For example, we can ask ourselves, how can I feel superior, inferior or even equal to others for qualities I simply inherited by birth,

through Karma and conditions. For Example, I was born a white female, in the USA. I was raised in the Bay Area because my Dad found work here. I was born with certain physical and biological characteristics, mental and emotional capacities, all the result of karma and conditions. How can I feel superior, inferior or equal to others for qualities I had nothing to do with. I inherited them.

Here is a related quote taken from an article on conceit by Dr. Elizabeth Ashby and Brian Fawcett, called, *What Can Be Done About Conceit?*

Alternatively "I" am the result of past karma. My talents are not due to my own virtue, but have arisen on account of the skilled actions performed by vanished personalities whose karmic descendant "I" am. Therefore it is silly of me to be conceited about qualities which are not in any real sense "mine."
(From "The Sangha," The Journal of the English Sangha Association, III.11)
<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/bl014.html>

We can also recollect some of the words of the Metta Sutta relative to the suffering of conceit, and the peace that follows when we refrain from doing so.

Metta Sutta

This is what should be done

By one who is skilled in goodness,

And who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,

Straightforward and gentle in speech,

Humble and not conceited,

Contented and easily satisfied,

Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.

Peaceful and calm and wise and skillful,

Not proud or demanding in nature.

Let them not do the slightest thing

That the wise would later reprove.

In regards to these last two lines about being reprovved by the wise; as mentioned earlier, it is healthy to feel remorse about something we did that caused harm (which can result in disgrace/bad reputation). We can also reflect on what it looks like and feels like to behave in humble ways, to notice when we are feeling content and satisfied and to feel the peace that arises from this.

Reflections on "Fame and Ill-Repute"

How does this pair of winds directly apply to your life? It may not be so easy to see and name as our wanting/welcoming and repelling can be subtle, automatic. Here are some reflection questions that may help in identifying where and when we get caught by this pair:

In what ways do you notice your tendency to attempt to manage your reputation or to manage how others view you? How much time, effort and energy does this image management take? How much do you suffer over this? What Buddhist practices and teachings have brought you freedom?

Consider your interactions at work, with family, with friends, on **social media (facebook, twitter, etc...)** in **group emails or texts**, in spiritual groups such as IMC, IRC (interactions with other practitioners including via zoom), in other group related to your hobbies, recreational activities, clubs, organizations or associations you are active in.

High Status reflection questions:

1- What one fact about yourself do you think increases your status in the eyes of others. For example, maybe you went to a high status school or have a high status degree or job or position at a company, or live in a prestigious neighborhood, or attended high status meditation retreat, or are good friends with a high status person (name dropper), etc....What do you tell people about yourself to increase your status? Image management info?

2- What is your relationship to your "reputation"? When have you felt that was on the line or taken actions with the intention to enhance it?

3-When and on what basis do you compare yourself favorably to others? See how much inner detail you can notice about one instance of engaging in this mental activity. (Before, during and after)

4-Who do we know either personally or from afar, that is modeling Right relationship to this pair? What specific behavior is inspiring to us? Can we imagine behaving in this way in the future?

Low Status reflection questions:

1) What one fact about yourself do you think decreases your status in the eyes of others? Do you attempt to conceal this fact to manage your image or for other reasons.

2-When and on what basis do you compare yourself unfavorably to others? See how much inner detail you can notice about one instance of engaging in this mental activity. (Before, during and after)

3- What one fact about yourself (or someone you know) do you think decreases your status in the eyes of others? Do you share this fact with others? If yes, whom do you choose to tell and why?

There are many Dharma lenses in which to view and practice with this pair of winds such as ; the EightFold Path factors of Right View, Right Intention, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, the teaching on the three characteristics- impermanence, not self, and the truth of suffering, a reflection on karma and conditionality, the Four Noble truths and the practice of renunciation/letting go. Notice which Dharma teaching is most helpful to you in working with this pair of winds in a given situation.