

## *Does Being Able to be Disillusioned with and Letting Go of the Material World Mean Liberation?*

The impression that most people have about Buddhism is the notion of being disillusioned with and letting go of the material world. Thus, part of learning about Buddhism is learning how to be disillusioned with and how to let go of the material world so that one can liberate oneself. However, do these two factors assist in achieving liberation?

An average person believes that being disillusioned means someone is not obsessed with or deluded by the state that one sees or comes into contact with. For example, one can become disillusioned with wealth and treat it as mere worldly possessions which are impermanent and not lasting, so it is not worthwhile to wrack one's brains to pursue it. In other words, everything before one's eyes, including the state of the conscious mind, is not as real as we would have imagined. It is just like a scenario produced by a magician, only a temporary manifestation before our eyes which will eventually vanish. Therefore, the capacity to be disillusioned is to see through a mirage-like manifestation.

Because one has already become disillusioned and seen that everything is impermanent, and possesses a phantom-like appearance;

therefore, all venues of fame and fortune, power and positions, and various materialistic desires would be discarded. He would not insist on or cling to what is before his eyes, or become enslaved in this state and is consequently able to live freely and at ease within this state.

This kind of ability to be disillusioned with and let go of the material world is very similar to the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi. For instance, in the chapter Being free and unfettered, Zhuangzi mentioned his core thought: “Man should not be affected by any fetter. He should be free and easy. Everything should follow its own nature. They should be free at will at all times and space and not be bothered with external matters.” Yet is this kind of feeling free and easy in one’s mental state true liberation? Let us look at birds flying freely in the sky and fish swimming freely in water. Do they really liberate themselves? The answer is definitely no. Let’s look at the sutras to see how Buddha defines the meaning of liberation.

The truth about the way towards liberation in Hīnayāna Buddhism is to recognize the root or source of affliction. They should know how to subdue afflictions as well as how to ultimately liberate themselves from the fetter of afflictions. In other words, they must eliminate self-view and self-attachment. If both self-view and self-attachment still exist in one’s mind, one fundamentally fails to liberate oneself from affliction. At the same time, he won’t be able to stay away from the suffering of birth and death in the three realms.

The fundamental truth in the Mahāyāna Buddhahood-way is defined in a Sanskrit word called Bodhi. What is referred to as Bodhi is to become enlightened. It is what the *Heart Sūtra* taught about the True Mind that is “not arising or ceasing; not defiled, not pure; not increasing or decreasing.” This is every sentient being’s True-Mind tathāgatagarbha. The foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhahood-way is to personally realize the True Suchness of Buddha nature. Subsequently, one further one’s cultivation in a systematic manner to make progress from the lower to upper ground, and finally unearth all the virtues and merits associated with the various functions embraced within the True Mind to become Buddha. This achievement of becoming Buddha is ultimate liberation.

Thus, if Buddhist disciples only focus on being able to be disillusioned with and letting go of the material world, they will only attain a state that would appear superficially as if they are free and easy in the current life. From the point of view of the mundane world, this may seem to be working, but they won’t be able to attain true liberation in Buddhism. True liberation is based on being able to transcend the three realms by eliminating afflictions as well as completely achieving the wisdom and virtues required for a perfect Buddhahood practice. Therefore, successfully achieving the Buddhahood-way is ultimate liberation and not just becoming disillusioned with and letting go of the material world.