

Renunciation Week 2: What's the delusion that makes renunciation difficult?

“Wise renunciation goes against the current of gain—that very powerful assumption that happiness comes through having or storing up something, even a spiritual something. This assumption, which promises a way out of dissatisfaction, actually supports the nagging insecurity of assuming that we are fundamentally lacking, inadequate or needing to be propped up. As long as this assumption holds the mind, we can never realize the independent balance that is Dhamma. That is why if you really want freedom from the suffering that the mind creates, you have to be prepared to challenge the assumption of gain and loss. Otherwise you will be chasing its mirages and projections forever and losing touch with the way to freedom.” Ajahn Sucitto *Parami* (chapter on Letting Go)

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Even the Buddha was slow to warm up to the benefits of renunciation:

**“Even I myself, before my self-awakening, when I was still an unawakened Bodhisatta, thought: 'Renunciation is good. Seclusion is good.' But my heart didn't leap up at renunciation, didn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace. The thought occurred to me: 'What is the cause, what is the reason, why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace?' Then the thought occurred to me: 'I haven't seen the drawback of sensual pleasures; I haven't pursued [that theme]. I haven't understood the reward of renunciation; I haven't familiarized myself with it. That's why my heart doesn't leap up at renunciation, doesn't grow confident, steadfast, or firm, seeing it as peace.**

—The Buddha, AN 9.41

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“When I was a hospice chaplain, I developed a friendship with a sweet wise old man of Basque origins. Every time we would visit, at some point his mind would wander off, and shaking his head at our foolishness, he would smile and exclaim, “We want, we want, we want. We don't know what we want, we just want.” The day is going along peacefully and easily, and we decide to stir up a little wanting---get onto the computer, go to Amazon, check our emails, check our likes on Facebook, look for an article that validates our opinion, get something to eat---looking in any direction other than here. We experience peace and ease in just this life, and yet we turn to wanting. “
David Cohn

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Dzongar Khyentse Rinpoche, sums this up: “Renunciation implies the strong wish to free oneself not only from immediate sorrows but from the seeming endless cycle of conditioned existence. And with this renunciation comes a heartfelt weariness and disillusionment with the endless quest for gratification, approval, profit and status.”

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Reflection: Take something you habitually turn to for distraction or gratification (TV, surfing the web, snacking etc.). See how much you can notice about what you’re feeling just as you reach for it, what is the actual gratification or pleasure in it? How long does that last? How do you feel afterwards and how soon do you reach for it again? What happens when you sense right into the feeling of wanting itself, and breathe through that feeling? At what points in this cycle might it be useful to tune in to and cultivate one of the positive mind states (contentment, ease, simplicity) from the first week’s reflection?