Investing Your Inner Wealth

April 6, 2013

One of the problems in the mind is that there are so many conflicting voices inside. Some of the voices you can recognize as voices you’ve picked up from people you’ve known, parents, friends, TV, the internet. But even then, there are a lot of those voices that have become your voice. There are lots of you’s in there, with lots of different opinions, lots of different ideas about what you should be doing or saying or thinking at any time. It often makes it difficult to decide. But when we come to train the mind, we take this difficulty and we turn it to our advantage. Because, after all, if there’s only one you in there, you really couldn’t change it. Whatever way you were, that’s the way you’d have to be. If you were innately good, then there wouldn’t be anything you’d have to do. You’re good already. But if you felt that there was something wrong inside, and there’s just one you in there, you really couldn’t do anything about it. But the fact that you’ve got all these different people inside, you can use one or two or any number of the good members of the discussion to help train the other ones. And if the good members aren’t strong, well, this is part of the training, to strengthen them. There’s a book called The Craftsman which talks about how people who have physical skills, manual skills, tend to develop certain personality traits that go along with the skill. There’s patience, endurance, they have to learn how to use their ingenuity. And once you’ve developed these different identities, these different qualities around a particular skill, you find that they spill over into other parts of your life. That’s what we’re doing as we’re meditating. We’re working on a skill here that’s going to develop qualities that spill over into the whole rest of your life. You’re adding new members to the committee. Of course, the members won’t be very strong unless you have skill. For example, when you’re working with the breath, to stay with the breath you need some mindful members, in other words, to keep the idea in mind that this is where you’re going to stay. You can’t forget that. Of course, you find that in the beginning you will forget it. But if you make up your mind that you’re really going to work on strengthening this member of the committee, then as soon as you catch yourself wandering off, or having wandered off, you come right back. That’s important. You just come right back. You drop whatever it is that was distracting you, and you’re right here, back with the breath. It’s not like your mind has gone out someplace else. It’s right here. It’s simply that it’s focused on something else. You shift your focus over a little bit and you’re back with the breath. You want to reward that member of the committee, so you breathe really nicely for a while. Then you say, “Why breathe nicely just for a while? Let’s keep on breathing nicely.” For a while it’s interesting, and then you suddenly lose it for a bit, and you come right back. As you stick with this, you develop some important skills. There’s your alertness, there’s your mindfulness, and the quality of ardency, when you really want to do something right. This is where the element of desire comes into the practice. Desire is not always a bad thing. The desire to do this skillfully is actually what keeps you going and develops the skill. And if you find that you’re having trouble with it, just remind yourself that these are weak members of the committee, but they can be strengthened. Don’t fall into the pit where it says, “Well, I’m just a miserable meditator. I can’t do anything right.” And then you just think of all the other things in life that you can’t do right, and everything just piles on. That kind of thinking is no help at all. It’s like you’ve been investing in some poor stocks, and the return is pretty bad. You think, “Well, there’s something wrong with my money. It can’t be invested in anything else.” You can’t think that way. You just realize, “Okay, these are poor stocks I’ve been investing in. I’ve got to invest in some better ones.” So you look around and find the better ones. Your money is perfectly good. Simply, you put it in the wrong place. It’s the same with the members of the committee. You’ve been developing some unskillful ones, identifying with them. But that doesn’t mean you always have to identify with them. You can develop these new skills that go with the meditation, that go with the practice, and you get a better return. It’s just that you’ve got to learn patience. This is another quality that comes with developing a skill. If the results don’t come right away, you’ve just got to stick with it, stick with it. You’ve got to give yourself encouragement. If the mind has a lot of negativity and says, “Oh, I can’t do this,” and again you start thinking about all the other things you can’t do, you’ve just got to learn to put that aside and say, “Nope, I’m not going there. Here’s something I really want. Here’s something I can’t do.” Then you remind yourself of the advantages of having the mind trained and the disadvantages of not training it. You learn to give yourself pep talks and to believe in the pep talks. Don’t be the sort of person that believes only in the negative voices, because that just ties you down. In other words, it’s important that you realize you do have these choices. Our sense of identity is not something that you’re already handed willy-nilly. You develop it yourself. And if you’ve been developing it in an unskillful way, you can change the way you develop it. Sometimes you hear that there’s your true self and then there’s your conventional self, or there’s your ultimate self and your conventional self, and that they’re already a given. That’s not the case. You create your sense of self out of all the different skills you have, based on the different desires you have. That’s why there are so many different selves in there, because there are so many different desires. So as you practice, you want to focus on the desire to do this really well and realize that everything else in your life depends on this. So you want to focus a lot of attention here. If that makes you feel stressed out, drop that thought and find something else that encourages you. In other words, you have to learn how to be your own pep talk giver. You have to learn what’s going to motivate you. And the sort of self-defeatist attitude that says, “Maybe I don’t have it in this lifetime,” in and of itself will probably make sure that you don’t have it in this lifetime. But it’s not something that you have to identify with. It’s not something you have to believe. You’ve just been investing your money in the wrong stocks. So take your money out of those and put it in something else. The opportunity is there. The choice is there. You can learn new skills. Now, for all of us sitting here, we’re all adults, and it’s harder to think about taking on new identities. But it’s not impossible. As long as you’re alive, as long as you’re breathing, change is possible. New skills are possible, particularly in the area of the mind. So look at the voices you’ve got arrayed in your mind right now and try to figure out which ones are the helpful ones, which ones are the ones you want to invest in. The Buddha talks about developing noble wealth, and it’s basically qualities of mind that really are helpful. Conviction in that you really can change your ways, that you can abandon unskillful behavior and develop skillful behavior. Virtue, the idea that you want to avoid harming anybody. A sense of shame and compunction. In other words, when you see yourself doing something unskillful, you feel ashamed about it. Not that you’re a shameful person, but that the behavior makes you ashamed. And if you realize that that kind of behavior is going to cause trouble down the line, that’s what compunction is. Realizing that you actually really do have consequences and you want to be careful about them. It’s the learning that you’ve learned. It’s what you’ve picked up from reading the Dhamma or hearing the Dhamma. There’s generosity, there’s discernment, the ability to see which voices, which identities are really going to be useful and which ones are not. All of these things are inner wealth. This is where you want to invest your energy, invest your sense of identity, as long as you need a sense of identity on the path. And we all need this identity until we get to the very end. Realize that you can change your ways, and in changing your ways, you change who you identify with inside. You strengthen the good committee members and you weaken the ones that are going to get in the way, because you’re not investing in them. You’re not feeding them. So if you look at your actions and see that they’re causing suffering, always remember that you can change. You change what you do, you change what you say, you change what you think. And in picking up these new skills, you change who you are, your sense of what your possibilities are, what your potentials are. So that the committee of the mind, instead of being just a raucous, unruly meeting, actually becomes a team. A team that gets more and more skilled in understanding where there’s suffering and stress and what you can do to put an end to it. That’s how you turn all these voices to your advantage.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2013/130406_Investing_Your_Inner_Wealth.mp3>