A Home for the Mind (med-fi)

August 17, 2013

Tonight we’re celebrating the new guest house. It’s the fruit of a lot of people’s generosity, all of us working together to make this a reality, a place where people can stay and meditate in comfort. The Buddha talked about the accomplishments of different gifts. When you give food, you give strength. If you give a lamp, you give light. If you give a dwelling, you give everything. In other words, when you have a comfortable place to stay, a good roof over your head, walls around you, it helps with the strength of the body. You don’t have to fight off the elements. It provides a safe place for you so you can practice. Of course, having a safe place and comfortable place like this is something you do outside and you do inside as well. The Buddha talks about the mind settling down and concentration as also being a dwelling for the mind. In Pali, it’s called viharadhamma, a home for the mind. And in this home for the mind, on the one hand, you want to find a sense of ease. This is why we work with the breath, finding a way that the breath can be comfortable, coming in and going out. Because if the mind is not at ease, it’s going to close up. It’s not going to look at itself and see what it’s doing wrong. It’s not feeling burdened when it’s feeling oppressed. It’s very easy to point out things outside that feel burdensome, things outside that feel oppressive. And you don’t have any inclination to want to look inside to see why you’re bringing that burden inside. Because it’s the burden you’re bringing inside, the oppression you’re bringing inside. That’s the suffering and the stress that weighs down the mind. But it’s also the suffering and stress we can cure. So the first requisite is to put the mind in a good mood so it’s willing to look at its own faults, look at its own shortcomings. That’s why we need a comfortable place to stay, a good, solid, secure, and stable place to stay in the present moment. We don’t have a good place to stay. Trying to keep your attention in the present moment is like trying to balance a marble on the tip of a needle. It slips off. It slips off very easily. There’s just nothing to hold it here. But if you can breathe a sense of well-being that goes throughout the whole body. Each time you breathe in, think of the energy coming in from any direction at all. It doesn’t have to come in just through the nose. Come through all the pores of your skin, coming to nourish the whole body. That provides a sense of well-being. The more steady you can make that well-being, the more comfortable your viharadhamma, your sense of home for the mind. The same with the Brahmaviharas. You can think thoughts of goodwill for all beings, thoughts of compassion, thoughts of empathetic joy, thoughts of equanimity for all beings. That provides a good dwelling for the mind. Because these are thoughts. Thoughts that have no poison. They have no sharp ends, sharp edges. They feel good for the mind. They’re nourishing for the mind as well. So whatever topic you can choose that gets the mind to settle down with a sense of well-being, a sense of ease, that can be your viharadhamma, your home, your shelter. And you want to learn how to cultivate it. Don’t try to skip through this step in the meditation too quickly. Because it takes time for the mind to be trained so it’s willing to settle down and to stay there. And to gain a sense of refreshment, a sense of rejuvenation. Again, this is what the guest house provides. It’s a place where people can rest, gather their strength as they practice. But after all, this is a guest house for meditators. It’s not just a motel. In other words, it’s not just for resting. In the same way your meditation is not just for resting. You use the strength that you’ve gained from your concentration to look into the mind to see where is it causing itself trouble. What are the thoughts that arise? What are the perceptions? That arise and shoot arrows into the mind. The Buddha once made a comparison. He said when there’s physical pain, it’s like being shot with one arrow, but we don’t leave it at that. We create lots of trouble around the pain. We shoot ourselves, he says, with a second arrow. Although actually that seems like too few. We shoot ourselves with many arrows over the things that bother us outside. And so this is what we have to see. This is what we have to investigate. Why is it that the mind adds extra suffering to itself? It’s because it’s looking for its pleasures and looking for its happiness in the wrong place. You want things to be a way that they can’t be. You find a little bit of pleasure outside and you want it to stay that way. You try to fight to protect it, to keep it from being changed. And of course it changes on you. That’s what adds the suffering. So if we can learn how to look at the way the mind is confused, the way the mind is deluded and in the search for happiness, we can relieve a lot of the suffering that the mind creates for itself. If we realize that the only true happiness is one that can be found within by developing the good qualities of the mind, then we can do that. So as you think about the guest house that we built here, remember that it’s a good symbol for the mind in meditating. On the one hand, it is a place to rest. But secondly, it’s a place to do work on the mind, to dig down into the mind, to understand where, even in the stillness, is it causing itself unnecessary stress? Sometimes when you get the mind still, you think, well, I only want to do is just keep the mind still this way and run away from the rest of the world and I won’t suffer. That’s not the case. The seeds for your suffering are still here in the still mind. So you want to be able to take the stillness of the mind and then use it to look more deeply into the ways that the mind creates suffering and stress for itself. That’s when the meditation achieves its true purpose. In the same way that when people come here to rest and also to meditate, that’s when the guest house achieves its purpose. There are lots of places you can rest. You can stay home and rest if you want. But you can come here and there’s both rest and there’s work to be done, good work. A work of figuring out your own mind. When you’ve figured out your own mind and you see where it’s causing itself unnecessary stress and suffering, you can stop that. Then you can live anywhere in the world. This is where your Riharadha Dhamma becomes a mobile home. Everywhere you go, you’ve got a place of safety. You’ve got a place of security. Because you found something of really deep value inside.

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