Settling into the Present (outside)

October 18, 2015

Okay, let’s start by spreading thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for happiness, your happiness, the happiness of others. Tell yourself, “May I be truly happy.” Remember that true happiness comes from within. Which is why the wish for your own true happiness is not selfish. You’re going to be using your own inner resources. And when you’ve developed your inner resources, then you have more to share with others. It also means that your true happiness doesn’t conflict with anyone else’s true happiness. This is why the wish for goodwill, the wish of goodwill, can be unlimited. You can spread it to all beings, good, bad, indifferent, people you think deserve to be happy, people you don’t think deserve to be happy. You erase that distinction. May all living beings be happy. Because when you hold that thought in mind, at the very least it helps you develop the right motivation, not only for your meditation, but for all your life. You want to make sure that your actions don’t harm anybody at all. That way there’s no regret, there’s no denial, and your happiness has a solid foundation. This is what the Buddhist teachings are all about, is creating a happiness with a solid foundation. You saw that beings all want happiness, but we create a lot of suffering. It’s out of our ignorance. Now, there’s nothing wrong with the desire for happiness. It’s just that we have to approach it with more wisdom. We have to think about cause and effect, what’s going to last, what’s not going to last. As the Buddha said, “True wisdom begins with a question. What, when I do it, will lead to long-term welfare and happiness, and what, when I do it, will lead to long-term suffering?” The wisdom there lies in the fact that when you realize happiness or suffering depend on your own actions. There’s a stress of just being in the world. Whether you act in the world or not, that’s going to impinge on you. But it doesn’t impinge on the mind. It’s your own actions that take the events of the world and bring them inside and stab yourself with them. So that’s what you’ve got to look into, your own actions. Your actions start with your breath. That’s why the Buddhist recommendations for meditation center primarily on working with the breath. After you spread thoughts of goodwill, come to your breath. Take a couple of good, long, deep, in-and-out breaths, and notice how deep breathing feels. If it feels good, you keep it up. If it doesn’t feel good, you can change. Take the breath more shallow, shorter, faster, slower, heavier, lighter. Experiment for a while to see what kind of breathing feels good. And you realize that the breath isn’t just coming in and out on its own. You’re having some impact on it. So you might as well have a good impact on it. It’s one of the few bodily processes that we have some control over. So learn how to exercise some of that control for the good. Create a sense of well-being right here. As you breathe in, as you breathe out, you find that your sense of the body will improve as the breath gets more and more comfortable. Because what you’re doing is providing a foundation here in the present moment. If you want to see your actions, this is where you have to watch them, right here, right now. Past actions, you can remember what you did, but you may not remember why you did it. As for future actions, those haven’t happened yet. If you want to see your actions and the motivation for your actions, you have to look right now. And it’s not all that apparent. Sometimes it’s hard to see. You do something, you don’t know exactly why you did it. That’s because the mind isn’t quiet enough. It’s busy with a lot of other activities. It’s like you’ve got a lot of flies buzzing around and you’re paying all attention to the flies, not looking at what’s going on deep down inside. So allow the flies to fly around for a bit and then, as long as you’re not moving, they’ll lose interest and you can settle down. When the breath gets comfortable, be careful not to leave the breath and just wallow in the comfort. Stay with the breath because that’s the cause. Your attention to the breath is the cause for making the breath feel good. And if you just go to wallow in the comfort, you cut off the cause. Either the comfort will end, or you go into a state where you’re not really clear about where you are. You’re not with the breath, but you’re not sure where else you are. And that’s not good for the meditation. You want to be solidly with the breath in the present moment, so you can see your mind in action. As for the pleasure that comes out from the breath, just allow it to spread, spread, spread, but you don’t have to do anything else with it. Think of it spreading out and diffusing throughout the entire body. This way you develop a good foundation, because if you want to stay in the present moment, you have to stay with a sense of comfort, a sense that this is a good place to stay. So we create that sense of comfort, then it’s a lot easier to observe your own mind, to see that when it moves toward an object, why is it moving? What’s pushing it in that direction, or what’s pulling it in that direction? What do you find attractive about going to think about that, or thinking about doing this, or saying that, or whatever? What’s the allure? And sometimes when you’re coming from a position of well-being with the breath, you see that the allure of certain things that you used to like to do is just not that strong anymore. You see that the allure of certain things that you used to like to do is just not that strong anymore. It can begin to lose power over you because you are hungry and weak. It can begin to lose that power because now you’re getting stronger, well-fed. Because the mind gets quiet, then you begin to see the little movements of the mind, the little motivations that push you here, push you there. And you begin to see your reasons, why you liked doing something, or why you wanted to do something, and you can step back from them. This is probably one of the most important skills in meditation, is learning how to step back. This is what the teaching on anatta, or not-self, is all about. We get into a world of thought, and we take on their identity in that world of thought. And unless we can abandon that identity, we can’t get out. But when you become a meditator, you have a new identity. You’re the meditator now. It gives you an identity to fall back on when you realize, oh, you’ve taken on a different identity in following another distraction. Remind yourself, hey, I’m meditating. That’s enough to wake you up, get you back to the breath. As for that other you in that world of thought, just let it go. You have the choice. This is probably one of the most central teachings of the Buddha left behind, is we do have the choice of what we’re doing. So we can choose to be more skillful, to be more attentive, to be more observant. We can take our power of choice and use it to find the true happiness that we want, ’cause we’re doing it with more alertness, more awareness, more wisdom. And we realize that it comes from training our own minds. So this is what we work on, training the mind. If you want true happiness, this is what you have to do, work on the mind. It’s not a matter of getting certain things to be just a certain way outside, getting your home to look just like this, or your clothing to look like that, or your friends to be just like this, or society to be just like whatever. You can work and work and work and try to get these things just right, and then they change on you. ’Cause there’s nothing out there that’s permanent. And if your happiness depends on things being just so outside, you’re setting yourself up for a fall. But if you train the mind so that it can be content inside with itself and not arguing with itself and not fighting with itself all the time, find some peace inside by finding a real source of happiness in here, developing that source of happiness, then no matter what the world is like outside, no matter what your clothing, no matter what your house, your friends, society, you can still find happiness within. And your actions are conducive not only to your own happiness, but they’re conducive to the happiness of others too. At the very least, just set a good example. You think about the time when there’s warfare and most people are behaving in ways that are, you know, they would be ashamed to talk about. And occasionally you find a few people who behave in a way with dignity and honor. It’s because they have their inner resources. And they have that sense of well-being regardless of how bad things get outside. That’s the kind of strength you want to have inside. ’Cause we can’t depend on the world to be peaceful all the time. We can’t depend on things to go smoothly all the time. So we have to have our minds prepared so that no matter what happens outside, we still have our own inner resources that we’ve developed. And all the warring factions in our mind finally come to a sense of agreement because this happiness inside really is genuine, really is reliable. The warring goes on because we haven’t found anything reliable yet. And so this side has that argument and that side has this argument and everybody’s guessing. And there’s nothing really certain or sure. It’s because you haven’t developed the skills you need inside. So for the time being, work on this skill, staying with the breath as continually as you can. You develop mindfulness, in other words, keeping the breath in mind, alertness, watching what’s going on, and ardency, the desire to put your whole heart into this, to do it well. So you can establish a sense of being at home here in the present moment so you can see more deeply into your own mind to be clear on what it’s doing and why it’s doing it. And how you can look for that happiness that we all want in a way that’s really skillful and effective. These are some of the things that come from learning how to stay right here with a sense of wellbeing. So work with the breath, get acquainted with the breath, the different ways that you have of breathing to wake you up when you’re tired, to calm you down when you’re nervous, to bring things inside the body into balance so that you want to stay here. And when you’re here, that’s when you can see the things that are really worth seeing, things that are necessary to see. If you want the true happiness, that’s not going to change. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2015/151018_Settling_into_the_Present_(outside).mp3>