Respect Your Mind

February 13, 2016

When you meditate, you’re showing respect for your own mind, respect for its power, and respect for its potentials. The power here is the power to do a lot of good or a lot of evil. In this way, you have to respect your mind the same way that you might respect gunpowder. Or a bomb, or a missile. There’s a potential for a lot of danger that the mind can do. Look at all the trouble in the world that the human mind has created. The respect here is tinged with heedfulness in the sense that there’s danger here. But at the same time, there’s also a lot of potential good if you use gunpowder properly or use explosive properly. You can get rid of a lot of things that are getting in the way of progress. It depends on what you blow up and what you don’t blow up. That requires a lot of discernment. Respect for the potential here is that the mind has the potential for a lot of good, and it can do things when it’s concentrated, when you’re mindful, and when you have concentration. You can do things you wouldn’t imagine otherwise. The Buddha talks about three levels of discernment. There’s the discernment that comes from reading and listening. We understand things on one level when we can read them and understand them that way. Then there’s another level where you take things and you think them through to see how consistent they are, to see how useful they might be. But then there’s the discernment that comes from developing. In other words, you actually develop these qualities in your mind, and that’s when you find out what their real potential is. In some cases, that potential can threaten the frame that you have run which you’ve decided you’re going to believe in or you’re going to follow. But it threatens it in a good way. It shows you that there’s a lot more to the mind than you may have thought. So you want to respect this potential. At the same time, we’re respecting our desire for something that’s worth of respect, our desire for true happiness. And happiness doesn’t harm anybody. Happiness is solid, dependable. The only way you’re going to find happiness like that is by looking inside. And the only way you’re going to see it inside is if you allow things to settle down. Otherwise, our minds are like a bottle of cellulite. There’s the oil and there’s the vinegar, and when it’s shaken up, it’s all mixed together. You can’t see clearly which part is the oil and which part is the vinegar, but you let it sit still for a while. And things begin to separate out on their own. It’s the same as we sit here and meditate. We bring everything together and then allow it to settle down. And as it settles down, you begin to see there are different layers to the mind, different layers to the stillness of the mind. There are different things going on in here that we tend to glom together. In the area of the body, we tend to glom our pains onto our physical sense of the body. So say there’s a pain in your knee or a pain in your ankle. The pain in the ankle and the pain in the knee seem to become the same thing. But if you sit still with these things long enough, you begin to see, okay, the body is created of a sense of solidity and liquid and warmth and energy. And the pain is none of those. The pain is something else. It flits around. And when you can see the distinction, it makes it a lot easier to live with the pain. The same with the mental troubles we create for ourselves. When we tie things together, we have all kinds of stories we can create. Several people over the past couple of days have been talking about suddenly remembering embarrassing things they did in the past. It just kind of pops up into the mind and then you grab onto it. You have to learn how to take these things apart, take apart the thought that’s popped up and take apart the act of grabbing on. And you begin to see they’re made out of things that are not all that solid. There’s the form of the body, where the mind and the body meet, and there’s a little stirring right there. And that stirring could either be interpreted as a physical event, i.e., it’s an issue in the breath energy, or it’s a mental event. And once you think it’s a mental event, then you place a label on it and it becomes a thought about this, that, and the other thing. And through association, or sometimes just through sheer randomness, a thought of the past will come up. What’s it made out of? It’s made out of the feelings there, and there’s the picture you hold for yourself, and there’s a story you tell yourself around it. Those are feelings and perceptions and fabrications. And we glom them all together and it turns into a narrative with an emotional coloring. If you see that it’s causing suffering, take it apart and say, “Oh, that’s just a perception, that’s just a fabrication, that’s just a feeling.” That’s all. Just think of it as it’s just that and it’s that all. That’s all. There’s nothing more that you have to make out of it. In other words, you’ve got to clear these things away by dividing them up into little bits and pieces and seeing that’s what they originally are. We’ve glommed these things together and they get in the way of our being able to settle down and have a sense of clarity here in the present moment. Then you begin to see also how the mind creates a lot of unnecessary suffering for itself. We already have enough suffering as it is with having to deal with a body that ages and grows ill and is eventually going to die, knowing that we’re going to have to be separated from all the people and the things that we love. That right there is enough to suffer from, but then we add on top of it all kinds of unnecessary stuff. And that gets in the way of our understanding ourselves and understanding the potentials of the mind, that there really is a potential here inside for a happiness that’s deathless, that’s not affected by anything at all—aging, illness, death, separation, whatever. None of those things can touch the happiness that is possible inside—the sense of well-being that lies deeper than anything conditioned. But to find that, you have to clear away a lot of the stuff we’ve plastered on top of it, a lot of the stuff we hold on to pretty dearly. It’s like knowing that you’re going to have to move quickly and you go through the house and everything seems to be something you want to hold on to, something that has some meaning, something that has some emotional ties. If you let all your emotional ties hold you down, you’ve got to put everything in the house in a big bag over your shoulder, and you never get anywhere. There are certain things we’ve got to give up if we want to find true happiness. And it turns out that once you’ve found the true happiness, you look on the things you have to give up, and they don’t have any worth at all. The problem is that they have worth now for us, because that’s all we have. As the Buddha pointed out, sometimes you can have just very meager belongings, but you can be really attached to them, as much as someone who has really fine belongings. There’s nothing objective about the things that make them more or less worth holding on to. All the emotional color we would give to them. So to find a happiness that’s really worthy of respect, we have to sort through our own minds and see what we have to let go of, and learn how to let go with a sense of not regretting the fact that we’re letting go, seeing that the things we’ve been holding on to really aren’t worth all that much to begin with. The image in the Canon is of a person who’s blind, and someone playing a trick on him. He says, “Here’s a wonderful white cloth. It’s really clean and really nice, and you look really good carrying it around. But it’s a greasy old rag.” But the blind person carries it around, thinking he’s got this wonderful, valuable piece of cloth. And then it so happens that his friends and relatives find a doctor who’s really good and can cure him of his blindness. So the first thing he does is he looks at the cloth, and he realizes it’s a greasy rag. He realizes he’s been fooled. So he throws it away, no matter how much he held on to it, no matter how much he valued it before. Once he sees that it’s not worth what he thought it was, he throws it away. You have to realize that the value of the mind is something worthy of a lot of respect, and the potentials of the mind are worthy of a lot of respect. So you have to ask, “What’s the value of the mind?” What are we showing more respect for, in terms of our greed or our aversion or our delusion? Why do we respect these things so much? They provide their pleasures. But we tend to turn a huge blind eye to their drawbacks. Even when we admit their drawbacks, this part of the mind is just not willing to let go. As the Buddha said, to see through these things, you have to see their drawbacks, but you also have to see what their allure is. What is it that attracts you to them? Part of you may not like your anger, but there’s a part of you that does. Part of you may not like your greed, but there’s a part of you that does. You want to ferret out that part that does. Because that’s a part of the mind that’s getting in the way of the potential of what the mind can really do. It’s dragging you down. One of the reasons we show so much respect for the Buddha and the Dhamma Sangha around here is because they teach us to respect something that’s really worthy of respect in ourselves—one, the potential of the mind, and two, the mind’s desire for true happiness, a happiness that’s blameless, a happiness that’s solid. These things really are worthy of respect. So we respect not only in physical respect, in thinking respectful thoughts, but actually by doing the work of cleaning out the garbage in the mind, cutting through all the little strings we’ve tied around ourselves, so that we can finally see that the mind really is something that has the power and the potential to provide that happiness that we want, and the happiness that’s worthy of respect. As the Buddha said, it’s blameless. Not only blameless, it’s really something worth bowing down to. They tell stories of the ajahns who, on attaining full awakening, just get up and bow down. Realizing all the trouble the Buddha went through to find this truth and to pass it along, and all the people who’ve passed it along from him. When you realize what they went through but at the same time what they have to offer, that’s the spontaneous response. Respect.

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