Basic Meditaton

February 20, 2016

We start the meditation with thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for happiness, true happiness. We know that true happiness has to come from within. Because there’s nothing outside that’s going to be solid enough or lasting enough to provide a happiness that’s really safe. So we think about why we’re here meditating, why we’re here training the mind. It’s because we need to get the mind in shape so it can see deeper into itself and find that what it’s really looking for is here inside. We have goodwill not only for ourselves, but also for others, because we realize that if true happiness comes from within, your true happiness doesn’t have to conflict with anyone else’s. And for happiness to be really safe, it can’t involve the oppression of anybody. It can’t be based on anyone else’s suffering. So it gives you more motivation for looking inside. So spread some goodwill to yourself to tell yourself, “May I be truly happy,” remembering that that’s not a selfish thought. And then spread the same goodwill and thought to others—as many people as you can think of, as many living beings as you can think of. Remind yourself that what you’re doing here is something that’s for everybody’s good. Because the more true happiness you have, it’s not the case that you’re going to be the only person who benefits. The people around you will benefit as well. And once you’ve spread those thoughts of goodwill around, now you can turn and look inside. What have you got here right now? You’ve got the body sitting here breathing, and you’ve got the mind thinking and aware. So bring all those things together. Think about your breath and be aware of your breath as it comes in and goes out. You have to remind yourself to stay here because it’s very easy for the mind to go slipping off. Especially in the beginning, the breath isn’t all that interesting. It comes in, goes out. That seems to be about it. But if you stick with it long enough, you’ll find that you can breathe in different ways, in ways that feel nourishing inside, replenishing inside. And then there’s no reason to breathe in a way that’s uncomfortable. In fact, the more you can develop a sense of ease and well-being inside, the better your mood will be. And the easier it’s going to be to look at your life, look at your actions, and figure out what you’ve been doing that’s not really skillful and how you can change. Because you’re coming from a better place, a place of inner well-being. So watch your breath for a while and notice how the breathing has an impact on your sense of the body. Pose that question in mind. What kind of breathing is too long? What kind of breathing is too short right now? What kind of breathing is too heavy, too light? Well, you can adjust. The breath is one of the few processes in the body that you can actually have some control over, some conscious control. So take advantage of that. Any other thoughts that come into the mind right now, you can just let them go. And lots of thoughts will come crowding in. When you’re with the breath, it seems like there’s a big empty space in your mind and lots of stuff can come crowding in. But just say, “For the time being, I don’t need to get involved in any of those things.” You’re trying to develop qualities of mind. Qualities like mindfulness, the ability to keep something in mind, alertness, the ability to know what you’re doing right as you’re doing it, and the results that you’re getting from your actions. Concentration, staying with the breath. Staying with one topic. And your discernment as you begin to see what’s skillful and what’s not. Now, to see that what’s skillful and what’s not requires effort as well. Exert yourself in one direction and then you check, “Are the results good or are they not?” If they’re not, then you chalk it up to experience and try to figure out a better way to do it. These are all qualities that can be developed as you’re working with the breath. Because it’s not the case that you’ve come to sit here and everybody in your mind is going to be happy you’re sitting here. It’s as if you have a committee in there. And some of them are here voluntarily, and some of them have been dragged here. And they’re going to wait until you’re a little bit careless or a little bit heedless. There’s a gap in your mindfulness, a gap in your alertness, and then they’ll come crowding in. So you’ve got to be very careful. You’ve got to stay right here with the breath. Keep your mind to yourself. Stay here with the breath. And the more you can take an interest in the breath, the easier it’ll be to stay here. Because, after all, the breath is the force of life. Without the breath, you wouldn’t know the body. The body wouldn’t even be alive. Learn to think of the breath not as just the air coming in and out of the lungs, but the whole process of expanding the ribcage, the rising of the lungs, the rising of the abdomen, the rising of the shoulders, whichever parts of the body you feel as you breathe in and breathe out. What you feel is energy. So how does that energy feel? Does it flow well? Does it feel tight? If it feels tight, think of it relaxing so that no new tension builds up as you breathe in and you’re holding on to any tension as you breathe out. You get a sense of ease in any part of the body. Your torso, just think of it spreading around. Think of it going down your arms and legs. So you’re sitting here erect but relaxed and keeping tabs on what’s going on. Because in one way this is extremely easy, just sitting here and breathing. What’s hard about it is to develop that quality of continuous awareness, continuous alertness. That’s where the mindfulness helps. You keep reminding yourself, “This is where you want to stay,” because you can create a sense of well-being in the mind. You’re coming from a position of strength. So as you approach the world, you’re coming not as someone who’s feeling threatened or in danger of the world. You’ve got something good inside. It’s strengthening, soothing, energizing. So the choices come up in daily life. You’re coming from a better position to deal with them properly, to deal with them skillfully, with that thought in mind that we began with, that you want a happiness that doesn’t have to cause anyone else any suffering. Because that’s the only truly safe happiness there is. So those are the basic steps. Focus on the breath, allow it to be comfortable, and then think of that comfortable sensation spreading through the body. Allow your awareness to fill the body. You’ll be focused more on one point than the others. It’s like when you’re looking at a picture. You may be focused on one spot in the picture, but you see the whole picture. Be focused on one part of the body, but try to be aware of the whole body as you breathe in and breathe out. The more your awareness can spread out to fill the body, the more you’re really inhabiting the present moment, the less likely you’ll be to slip off to the past or future. Because if you’re going to know your mind, you have to watch it now. If you remember things you thought about or plan on things you want to think about in the future, you’re not really observing. You’re just dealing with your concepts of the past and concepts of the future. But if you want to see the mind in action, you want to understand your own mind in action, you’ve got to watch it here. So first give it a good, solid place to stay, one thing to stay with. Then when it starts moving away, you’ll know. Then you’ll have a sense of why it’s moving away. For the time being, you don’t have to analyze things too much. Just say, “I’m going to stay here.” Develop the skills needed to stay here. But you can’t help but notice that the mind goes slipping off. Something yesterday slipping off to something tomorrow. Nope, you don’t go with it. Just drop it for the time being. And if you suddenly find that you’re off in some thought bubble someplace else, well, just let it pop and come right back. Because you want to understand your mind, this is where you’ve got to watch it. If you want to strengthen the mind, this is where you strengthen it. If you want to soothe the mind, this is where you soothe it. Right here with the body and the mind meet, at the breath. But the effects of this will take some time. This is why we have a whole hour. If you compare this to medicine, it’s like a cream that you put on your skin. If you have a rash on your skin, you put the cream on the skin. You’ve got to let it sit there for it to do its work. In the same way, staying with the breath. You have to calm the mind down to soothe the body. Otherwise, you stay here for a little bit, then you’re off someplace else. It’s like putting the cream on your skin and then wiping it off. It doesn’t get a chance to do its work. So give this a chance. And if the mind wanders off, don’t get discouraged. It happens to everybody. Just keep dropping the thought and you’ll be back at the breath. Each time you come back, reward yourself with a breath that feels especially gratifying. Something that feels really good deep down inside. In that way, the mind will be more inclined to want to come back. Again, I sense that right here in the present moment is where it really belongs. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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