A Clean Mind

April 10, 2016

Close your eyes, and place your hands on your lap, and focus on your breath. When the breath comes in, know it’s coming in. When it goes out, know that it’s going out. Each time it comes in, each time it goes out. Try to stay right here. As for any other thoughts that come into the mind, just sweep them away. As you breathe in, think of the breath sweeping them out. As you breathe out, think of it sweeping them out. Try to clean up your mind a little bit. This is the New Year in Thailand, Songkran. It actually comes from India, the original tradition of having the New Year when the sun enters Aries, which according to their calendar is going to happen in a few days. And the tradition there is to give water blessings. It started out simply by pouring water over the hands of your friends and relatives, and then it developed into pouring water over everybody else. It’s the hot time of year when things are dusty and dry. And so the water is cool and it also cleans things off. You want to think about that today as you’re giving the water blessing to the monks. The devas have already given their water blessing this morning. They’re probably going to give it some more today to remind us to wash things out. Not just washing our bodies or washing the things around us, but also washing out our thoughts and our words and our deeds. This is an important principle because it’s our deeds, our thoughts and our words and deeds that are going to shape the next year. We want to make sure that they’re clean. What does it mean to have clean thoughts, clean words, clean deeds? Well, the clean deeds, it means no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex. Clean words means no lying, no divisive speech. In other words, trying to break friends apart from each other. No harsh speech, speech that was made simply to hurt somebody else’s feelings. No idle chatter. In other words, speech with no clear intent at all. Just open your mouth and whatever’s going to come out, it’s going to come out. You want to cleanse your words and deeds in this way. And especially you want to cleanse the mind. There are three things in particular the Buddha says that make the mind dirty. One is greed that goes beyond what’s appropriate for you. The other is ill will, and the third is wrong views. You want to wash these things out of your mind. This is one of the reasons why we meditate, to allow the mind to settle down and be still so it can recognize what’s going on in the mind. Not just simply run with it. Think of every thought that comes in. Step back and you get a chance to consider what’s good and what’s bad coming up in your mind. Think of your mind like a committee with lots of different voices, lots of different opinions. Some of which are good, some of which are not so good. Just because something gets recommended by somebody in the committee doesn’t mean that you have to follow with it. But often the mind is weak and it’s not paying careful attention, so whoever whispers in your ear, just run with that person. And then you start thinking about it afterwards and it’s too late. You want to think about these things before you do them. You want to look at your intentions to see if there’s any inappropriate greed, any ill will, or any wrong views involved in them. What is inappropriate greed? The kind of greed where if you want something but you would have to kill or steal or lie or cheat in order to get it. In other words, you’d have to harm yourself, harm other people in order to get that thing. That’s inappropriate greed. The Buddha never said not to have any desires at all. After all, he said that one of the hallmarks of a wise person is being industrious. In other words, seeing that there’s good that can come from working hard, taking care of what you’ve earned. So that you can have the things that you want that are appropriate for you. In other words, appropriate that you don’t have to do anything unskillful, anything against the precepts in order to gain them. As far as that’s concerned, you can desire as much as you want in terms of what’s good and what’s appropriate. What you can gain and be moral at the same time. That’s when your greed goes beyond that. In other words, you have to kill or you have to lie or you have to steal in order to gain these things. Lying in particular, there’s a lot of money-making that goes on in the world that comes through lying, and it’s really not worth it. What you gain is a little bit of money, but you’ve lost your virtue. After all, you went to all this trouble of being born as a human being. You’ve got a human mouth. Make sure you maintain that quality of a human mouth. Human mouths can say all kinds of things very good and very bad, but you want to do honor in the fact that you worked hard to get this mouth. So use it to say things that are true, things that create harmony, things that make people want to do what is good. And you don’t fill people’s ears with a lot of idle chatter. You want to make sure that you value your words. If you just spread your words around like sand, just anything that comes into your head goes out your mouth, it’s a sign that you’re not paying much attention to your words. And if you’re not paying much attention to the words, why do you want other people to pay attention? You don’t expect them to pay attention. You have to pay attention carefully to what you’re saying, and other people will start listening carefully, too. As for ill will, that means you want to see somebody else suffering. You have to remind yourself, what do you gain from other people suffering? You may say, “Well, they deserve it.” Well, even people, when they suffer in ways that are deserved, they end up resenting it. And a lot of the bad things that happen in the world are people who are reaping the results of past bad karma, and they don’t like it, and they’re going to fight against that. So you don’t want to wish harm or suffering on anyone. Your wish should be for goodwill, in other words, hoping that people will understand the causes of true happiness and act on it. This applies to yourself, this applies to other people. So you want to develop goodwill in addition to being industrious. And finally, right view, realizing that happiness and pain that you experience in this life come from your own actions. Some of these things come from past actions, but the important things are your present actions. Past actions don’t have to make inroads in the mind. The suffering that we carry around in our minds comes from our present actions. In other words, we act in unskillful ways towards the things that come up in the mind, and that’s why we suffer. So if you can learn how to act more skillfully in handling your own mind, and seeing that what you do is important, so you want to be very careful to make sure that what comes out of the mind in terms of the intentions that you act on, that’s something you can be proud of. You want to look back on your life. After all, this new year marks one more year in your life, getting closer and closer to the end. You want to think, what are you going to look back on when you get toward the end? You want to look back on a life that’s been well-lived, time that’s been well-used, not time that’s been wasted, or time that’s been thrown away. So you want to value the fact that you have this human life, you have all these human abilities. You want to keep them clean. Don’t let them get dirty with ill will, don’t let them get dirty with inappropriate greed, don’t let them get dirty with wrong views. Try to develop three good qualities. In other words, being industrious to gain what you want in a moral way, having goodwill for yourself and all other beings, and also having right views, and seeing that your actions make all the difference in your life. So you want to be careful about that. If you maintain these attitudes, then your mind is clean, and that cleanliness of the mind then goes out into your words and out into your deeds. So the important cleanliness is not the cleanliness that comes from the water outside. It’s the cleanliness that comes from looking carefully at what you need to clean up inside your mind. If you keep your mind clean, then the whole year is going to be clean, whether it’s raining or not, whether it’s hot or cold. As long as the mind is clean, then everything else that’s really important to your life is going to be clean as well.

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