Strong & Free (outdoors)

October 23, 2016

We’re born into a world where everything around us is subject to aging, illness, separation, death. What the Buddha discovered, though, was that the mind itself doesn’t have to be subject to those things. We live in a body that is subject to those things, but the mind doesn’t have to be subject. The mind can be free. The mind develops its own independent power. This is one of the reasons why we meditate, to get that independence inside, to learn how to depend on ourselves rather than to have to depend on things outside. Because as long as our happiness depends on things outside, other people can grab hold of it and squeeze it. It’s like just offering our heart to them so they can squeeze. So what we’ve got to do is find resources inside so that happiness can be independent. The Buddha talks about food for the mind. One of the kinds of food is sensory contact, the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations that we meet with in the world. These sort of things, for the most part, are nothing but snack food, the kind that, if you looked at the label really closely, you’d find it’s got all kinds of unhealthy things in there. It’s the kind of food that never satisfies you. It’s like potato chips. You give one and you can’t eat one. You can’t just eat one, you’ve got to have another one, then another one. And then you’ve loaded yourself down with fat and salt and all these other things that you don’t really need, and you’re still hungry. But there’s another kind of food called manosanjetanahan, the food of your entire being. It’s the food of your intentions. And this you can make into really nourishing food, like we’re doing right now. Your intention is to get the mind still, to be mindful, to be alert, to get the mind concentrated so it can understand what’s going on and figure out how it’s causing itself suffering and how it can stop. That kind of food is actually nourishing for the mind. It really strengthens the mind because it comes entirely from within. If you’re dependent on things outside being just so, you’re like a hothouse plant that can survive only under certain circumstances. The humidity, the temperature, the sunlight, everything has to be just right for the plant to survive. And if anything changes, the plant dies. It’s weak. But if your happiness depends on inside resources, then you can live anywhere and feel free, all you need. They compare meditation to food for the mind, shelter for the mind, medicine for the mind. They’re talking about the practice of virtue as being clothing for the mind. This way, you’ve got all your requisites for the mind right here. You don’t have to depend on things outside being a certain way. So get the mind to that point. You have to be really solid in your determination to stay right here. One of the reasons why when you practice concentration, you really want the mind to be still and not to be concerned about anything else at all. Sounds go past, just let them go past. Thoughts come in, just let them go past. Tell yourself they’re none of your business right now. Your business is to keep the mind firm. Otherwise, you get blown around. Sometimes just the slightest whisper and the mind gets sent off in miles and miles and miles. It’s like our ears like big sails on a boat, and all it takes is a little whisper of a wind and we go running away. So even though the ears are big there, make sure that your mind is not a sail to catch these things. Its attitude has to be that its happiness doesn’t have to depend on circumstances outside. It has to depend on things inside. And you develop those things inside, you really can depend on them. You develop a sense of ease with the breath. When you breathe in, it feels full and refreshing. Even when you breathe out, there should still be a sense of fullness. Don’t squeeze it out. Try to maintain that sense of fullness all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-breath. Make it unchanging in spite of the ins and outs of the breath. And then let that fullness spread throughout the body, seep throughout all the nerves and all the cells of the body. So you feel nourished. When there’s a sense of inner nourishment, then it’s a lot easier to look on things outside with a sense of equanimity. Because you realize that they don’t have to touch that sense of well-being inside. When the source of your happiness is safe like this, again, you’re safe too. Nobody can reach in and squeeze your heart anymore. Nothing that happens even with the body needs to squeeze the heart. We look at the body and realize it’s here for us to use. We’ve got this opportunity right now with the human body. Make the most of it. The Buddha has you reflect. Days and nights fly past, fly past. What am I becoming right now? And what you’re becoming is determined by your actions. What are you doing right now? What kind of habits are you developing in the mind? Are these the kind of habits you want to take with you? Are these the kind of habits that actually strengthen the mind or weaken the mind? If you go through the week living one way and then come to the monastery for one day and live another way, at the very least you’ve got some good habits in the mind, but the good habits you developed at the day of the monastery then tend to get thrown away, and the other habits tend to be stronger. So you want to be able to take this skill with you wherever you go. This is a skill that enables the mind to be independent and to be solid in the face of all the changes of the world. So have that sense you’re going to stick with the breath no matter what. It’s like those little fish that stick to a larger fish. No matter where the big fish goes, the little fish goes along. You want to have that same kind of adhesive quality in your mind, in your attention to the breath. And that will become a strength that gives more solidity to the rest of your thinking. Because once you’ve got this sense of well-being inside and you have an appreciation for how good it is, then the thoughts that will say, “Well, I need this out there, I need that out here, this has to be this way, that has to be this way, why is that person saying that?” They lose a lot of their hold over the mind. The reason we go for thoughts like that is that we’re hungry, and there may be a little bit of pleasure in criticizing other people, because that gives you a sense that you’re better than they are. But it’s pretty measly food, pretty miserable food. The good for the mind is the goodness that comes from within. That really does strengthen you. When you have that kind of food for the mind, then the little snacks and tidbits that you get from outside, you realize that this is not healthy for the mind. It loses a lot of its appeal. So we strengthen the mind both by our ability to stay with one object and also by the ability to learn how to look at the rest of the world with new eyes, based on our new skills. Learn to appreciate what this skill can do for you, and let it have its impact on your sense of the value of things outside. When they’re there, they can be used, and this is how you can be generous. You have to be generous with things in the world. You’ve got your body, you can use your body to be virtuous. Do all kinds of good things. Remember, the source of the goodness doesn’t lie there. The source of the goodness lies in the mind. You use these things, but there’ll come a time when you have to let them go. So use them while you’ve got the opportunity. But you have to be ready to let them go whenever it’s necessary. This is why the Buddha has you reflect every day at dawn. This might be your last sunrise. Are you ready to go? The answer often is no. What do you need to do to work on the mind so that if you do have to go, you’ll be able to let go clearly? Same with every sunset. This may be your last sunset. Are you ready to go if it happens tonight? If the answer is still no, there’s more work to do. Figure out what it is that the mind is still holding on to. Learn to let go of that. That way your time is well spent. That question, “What am I doing right now? What kind of person am I becoming?” You can have a good answer for it. At the same time, you’re making your mind free. Free to the point where coming, going, and staying are all equal. Because you realize they don’t touch the real goodness and sense of well-being that you can develop in the mind. It’s that well-being that makes you strong. It’s that strength that makes you free.

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