Expressing Gratitude

December 3, 2016

Tonight we’re marking the passing of 50 days since King Rama IX passed away. We’ve met to make merit for him. We’ve chanted, now we’re going to meditate. Because merit, after all, is a quality of the mind. It’s nurtured by generosity. It’s nurtured by virtue. It’s nurtured especially by meditation. When you do any of these things, we’re creating a happiness that doesn’t cause any trouble to anybody, a happiness that doesn’t create any divisions. In fact, it’s the kind of happiness that erases divisions. The happiness is based on gain, status, praise. That’s the kind of happiness that creates divisions. Because when one side gains, somebody else has to lose. And the more you try to gain, the more you create enemies. But with this kind of happiness, the more you create, the more friends you have, and the more there’s a sense of connection. Because the merit of self is not in the activities, it’s in the mind. These are activities that create happiness of this special quality in the mind. That’s what merit is. When someone we love, someone we respect has passed away, we want to dedicate as much merit as possible. Here in the States, we may not be as appreciative as people over in Thailand are, but Rama IX was a really great king. He lived by that principle that the Buddha set out, that the best king is the king that the people love. And how were they going to love the king? By his activities. He redefined what it means to be a king in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He maintained some of the old traditions, but he also did a lot of things that none of the other previous kings of Thailand or kings anywhere else, for that matter, had done. But he did live by the principle of the Dhammaraja, the Dhamma King. Someone tries to provide for the happiness of his people, and his people are going to love and respect him in return. It’s this kind of love and respect that creates connections. This is why respect, making merit, all these things go together. When someone passes away who hasn’t done much good, there’s not much respect, and you do a little bit of merit, then you forget. But someone who’s done a lot of good for the world, you want to keep on sending merit in their direction, both for their sake and for your sake. Because after all, who really benefits directly from the merit? You’re the one who benefits most. You’re sitting here getting the mind calm, getting it settled, putting aside all your concerns about the outside world, focusing on what you’ve got right here. You’ve got the breath, you’ve got the body, you’ve got awareness. And when you bring them together, they’re good for one another. It’s when they go right off in their separate directions, that’s when you’ve got trouble. They need one another for strength, they need one another for nourishment. If you’re not here with the body and the breath, it’s like the owner of a house not being at home. The owner’s outside, exposed to rain, sun, all kinds of dangers. Of course, the house itself is not being tended to. No one’s looking after it, no one’s caring for it. Mice move in, rats move in, the wood begins to rot. There’s no one to repair it. But when you bring your awareness to the breath and try to get them so they fit together well, then you want to stay in the house. You want to stay home. And when you’re at home, you can see, “Oh, this is not quite right, that’s not quite right.” So you work on it. Adjust the breath so it feels good. And then think of ways in which you can have that sense of good breath energy flow through the different parts of the body. It’s like looking after all the pipes and all the electric lines and all the other parts of the house. At the same time, the owner of the house has a sense of being sheltered, a sense of being at comfort at home. This is the kind of home where you’ve got an office where you can do work inside, do good work, the work of sorting out skillful and unskillful traits in the mind, figuring out which is which, and then figuring out how to encourage and develop the skillful ones and abandon the unskillful ones. That’s good work right there. The mind is engaged in good work like this. Like all minds, it’s not just passive. Your mind is active in the activity of the mind. As John Lee would say, it’s like a generator that sends out a current. And if your mind is scattered all over the place, it sends out a current that’s very irregular, the kind that if you hooked up a computer, the computer would be destroyed. Think about your mind. Sometimes the currents are really strong, sometimes they fluctuate back and forth. And if you ran a current like that through your house, things would start to explode. So you can imagine what kind of energy that kind of mind is sending out to the rest of the world. We see this all around us. People let their greed take over, let their anger take over. You see them, you hear them. And you don’t just see their activities and hear their words. There’s a sense of the energy that comes out of that. And it’s really disturbing. Whereas the energy that comes out of a still mind, that’s something calming, something nurturing, something that’s good for everybody around. So as you meditate, you’re creating a good energy that when you dedicate it to others, either people have passed away or people are suffering right now for other reasons. If the current is strong enough, they’ll feel it. Even if they don’t feel it, the current is good. It’s one of those cases where you may feel good and they don’t know why. But the fact that good energy is coming in their direction, that’s good for them. And you don’t lose any of your own in sending it out this way. A brahmin once came to the Buddha and asked him, “When you dedicate merit to people who have passed away, do they really get it?” He said, “If they’re in a position where they can, they receive it.” Then the brahmin said, “Does my merit get depleted by doing that?” And the Buddha said, “No. The original merit is already there, and the fact that you’re dedicating it, that adds more on.” So this is all to the good. It’s good for yourself, good for the people around you, whether they’re alive or have passed on. And so when you think of the people who’ve been good to you, the people for whom you have a debt of gratitude, this is one way of helping them. Again, as I said, in America we’re not all that sensitive to the good that the king has done. But think about it. If he hadn’t been there to hold the country together, when the Communists were taking all the nations around Thailand, there’d be nothing left of the forest tradition. You wouldn’t have this place to sit and meditate right here. So here you are a beneficiary of his goodness. So this is one of our ways of expressing our gratitude, is doing good ourselves and dedicating the merit back. It’s this kind of interplay of people helping one another along. This is what makes human life, human society, livable. This is what keeps it going. As I said, it was knowing that there was someone good at the top of the country that kept Thailand together. There are all kinds of forces that are trying to pull it apart. We lack that here in our country. But what we can do is make sure that in our circle of influence, we’re sending out good energy and we’re helping one another along. That kind of goodness doesn’t die with the body. It keeps going. you

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