Security

June 23, 2017

We’re born into this world where there’s aging, illness, and death. And it’s not just around us, this body that we’ve laid claim to. It’s also subject to aging, illness, and death. But what the Buddha’s offering us is a way not to suffer from that. It’s one of the reasons why we meditate. In fact, this is one of the reasons why he left home to begin with. He saw that he was looking for happiness and things subject to aging, illness, and death, and he himself was subject to these things. He realized there was no security there. He wanted to find something that was not subject to these things, because that was where the only security lies. So remind yourself of this as you’re setting down to meditate. You’re looking for something special inside. As for other things that would pull you away from the meditation, see that they’re not important. They too are going to lead to more aging, illness, and death, sometimes very quickly. Because this process applies not only to the body, but also to what they call “becoming,” these little worlds that you inhabit in your mind. You take on an identity in a thought world, and that also has aging, illness, and death. It arises, it begins to deteriorate, and then it disappears. We go from one to another, to another, to another, but none of them are stable. The meditation has the potential of becoming relatively stable. This is why we work on concentration. As Venerable Ananda once said, “If you’re the mind, this is the door to the deathless.” It’s not the deathless itself, but when the mind gets solid and still, that’s the way. In fact, that was the first aspect of Right View that the Buddha realized on his way to awakening, that concentration is the way. So this is the way out. You focus on the breath. You get the mind to settle down. Try to find a sense of ease with the breath, a sense of well-being. Because you’re going to have to use that sense of well-being to deal with all the other voices in the mind, the ones that want to pull you back. Here’s where it’s useful to think of the mind as a committee. Part of the committee is on board, and part of the committee is not. Then you’re going to have to learn how to deal with the part that’s not, because it gets in the way. Not only of your concentration, but it also gets in the way of your peace of mind in general. There are some voices in the mind that can be pretty harsh, pretty scary. They move in and they take over your breath. This is how a thought becomes an emotion. It affects the breathing, and the breathing affects the hormones. And then they say, “See, see, see, I’ve taken over. This is what you really fear. This is what you really believe in.” Because it’s not just a thought, it’s also a bodily process, it’s a bodily phenomenon. So you have to learn how to not get sucked into the conversations that these voices tend to engage in. One of the Buddha’s ways of dealing with distracting thoughts was simply to ignore them. He said, “You know they’re there.” But you don’t get involved. You try to involve yourself with the breath. Try to claim the breath as your own, because you can change the way you breathe. Breathe in a way that’s deep, calming, soothing inside. And no matter what the voices may be saying, no matter what outrageous things they may be proposing to pull you away, to distract you from the breath, just be really firm in your determination, “This is where I want to go. This is where I want to go. This is the way out.” You’ve got to reclaim the breath. You’ve got to get on good terms with the breath. So once you’ve got the breath on your side, then that weakens those other thoughts. And then you see they are just thoughts. And you have no idea where you picked them up. Sometimes you know, or at least you can suspect, because some of the voices will have a tone of voice that’s very familiar, like a member of the family or an old friend, an old teacher. Voices you’ve picked up from the media. Other voices you don’t recognize, but you can recognize that they are not skillful. They’re not in line with your determination that you want to find a happiness that’s secure. One of the chants we have is, “Those who see danger and respect being hateful.” We see danger in aging. We see illness and death. But hatefulness is the way out. It’s the same with that chant we had just now. Aging, illness, and death. Separation. These things are normal. And escape is that last reflection. “I’m the owner of my actions. Heir to my actions. Born of my actions. Related through my actions. I live dependent on my actions. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.” So you need to gain some control over your actions. It begins with your intentions, that you can find the way out. So you make up your mind. You’re going to stay right here with the breath. Get the breath on the side of the intention that wants to find some security. Then apply the Buddha’s analysis of what he calls the three perceptions, of inconstancy, stress, and not-self, to those other voices. Where would they lead? The Buddha says that they have an allure. There’s something about them that’s attractive, that leads you to believe them. Part of you feels that if you engage in these thoughts, either there’ll be a pleasure of some kind or else you feel that you can ward off danger, say, by being really, really afraid or really, really critical. You have to question that belief. Because the conversation in the Minds Committee is not a very orderly conversation. Every trick of the trade, every debater’s trick, every underhanded thing that anyone can do in order to push their way on somebody else, the mind will do that to itself. And you have to see where’s the hook and learn how to remove the barb so it doesn’t hook you again. If the thoughts are stubborn, you can be stubborn too. If they’re devious, well, you can figure out the twists and turns and not give in to the thoughts. They’re insistent that you have to think them or you have to believe them. Believe the voice of the Buddha instead that says true happiness is possible. It is possible in spite of aging, illness, and death and all the dangers we have around us. It is possible to find something in the mind that’s not affected by these things. And you can take your security there. Meanwhile, you take your security in the path. It’ll take you there in getting the mind in a concentration. Do whatever you can to let the mind settle down. That’s the way out. That’s the way that leads to security. The Buddha once gave an analysis of why we’re afraid of death. One is that we’re afraid of leaving the body. But you have to remind yourself the body is not you, not yours. There is a consciousness that will survive the end of the body. And you’re afraid of leaving the pleasures of the human life. There are greater pleasures that can come as the mind settles down and finds that it doesn’t have to depend on those pleasures outside. There’s the fear of remembering wrong things you’ve done in the past, the fear there may be a punishment after death. You say, “Whatever I’ve done in the past, that doesn’t matter. What matters is what I’m doing right now.” This is why part of the practice is observing the precepts so you don’t engage in unskillful activities. And finally, there’s the big fear of the uncertainty of the Dhamma. Is what the Buddha said really true? This is what eats away. And the only way you’re going to get past that one is to test his teachings, to develop the powers of mindfulness and alertness and discernment. That will allow you to see whether what the Buddha taught really is true or not. There have been many, many people who’ve guaranteed that, yes, it is true. And they’re reliable people. They’re people of honor. So in the beginning, the Buddha has you take this as a working hypothesis that, yes, there is a deathless dimension to the mind where true security can be found. And you take that as your priority, finding that. Then you begin to realize that the things you’re afraid of leaving behind are not nearly as important as this. So do what you can, working with the breath, working with the Buddha’s working hypotheses. Learn how to question the voices in the mind that would pull you away, that would want to pull you back to more aging, more illness, more death. You see the danger there. You see that there is something to be feared. But this is a clear-eyed fear. It’s not the fear that’s wound up in greed, aversion, and delusion. But it’s a fear that’s not debilitating, because the Buddha said there is a way out by being heedful, by being vigilant. Be very careful about how you speak, act, think. There is a way to safety. You look at the rest of the world outside, and very little safety is being offered. This interconnected system in which we live is very unstable. But if you develop good, stable qualities in the mind, then you can survive any changes. That’s the basic principle that the Buddha’s operating on. That’s the essence of his teaching. It’s where true security can be found.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2017/170623_Security.mp3>