From Within (outdoors)

July 30, 2017

Stretch your meditation with thoughts of goodwill. Wish for your own happiness. Nourish the happiness of others. It’s a way of cleaning out your mind before you meditate. If there are any people you’re angry at, any people you’re upset at, any people you’ve been having difficulties with, just tell yourself you want to pull out from all that right now. The best way to pull out is to wish everybody well. Because when you’re wishing goodwill, you’re basically wishing that you and other people will understand the causes for true happiness and have the strength and ability to act on them. Which means if they’re behaving in unskillful ways, or if you’re behaving in unskillful ways, you want those ways to change. That’s something you can wish for everybody. A part of the mind may say, “Well, I’d like to see these people suffer for a little bit first.” But do you want to identify with that part of the mind? You want to wash that out. Just think that the world would be a much better place if everybody could find true happiness inside. You don’t want the affairs of the world to weigh you down. When the Buddha talks about establishing mindfulness, the main part is to find an object to be aware of and to focus exclusively on that. But the second part is to just subdue anything in the world that would pull you away. So any thoughts about people out in the world, people you like, people you don’t like, just try to wash them away with mindfulness. Just think of them as thoughts of goodwill. For the time being, you don’t want to have any strings attaching you to anything outside. And then you can look within. Just like cleaning out the mind, you’re also cleaning out your body as you breathe. Think of the breath as sweeping through the body as you breathe in and breathe out. Any patterns of tension, just breathe right through them. Let them dissolve away. Think of the breath as a whole body process, from the top of the head down to the tips of the toes. Think of each breath washing through the whole body. What you’re trying to do is bring three things together here. You’ve got the body, you’ve got your awareness, and the glue that keeps the two of them together is a sense of well-being, both in the body and the awareness. Use the breath to help create a sense of well-being in the body, thoughts of goodwill to create a sense of well-being in the mind. Then everything can stay glued together. You want the feeling of ease to fill the body as much as you can, so that your awareness can fill the body too. When we’re getting the mind into concentration, we’re not just getting it in one spot. You may have one spot which is more pronounced than other spots in the body that you’re paying attention to, but you want to have a full body awareness so you can see how that spot connects with everybody else. The more spacious the sense of well-being inside the body right now, the easier it is going to be for the mind to settle down and have its own place right here. We try to live outside the world, but it’s not really our place. The things of the world are never really ours. Some of them we can borrow for a while, we lay claim to them for a while, but then that claim begins to erode away. Eventually, the body is going to have to erode away, but for the time being, it’s yours. Your breath is your breath. No one else knows how it feels. You’re dealing with a part of your awareness that nobody else can know at all, how the body feels from within. You want to make this your dwelling place, because nobody else can get in here, aside from the thoughts that you let in. You have to be very careful. You’ve set up mindfulness as your gatekeeper. Any thoughts that come in that are not related to the breath, you just let them go so you can go someplace else. You don’t have to take them in. As for thoughts dealing with the breath, anything that helps you settle down, that’s perfectly fine to think about, because it does take some thinking for the mind to figure out how to get with the body, how to stay here. Sometimes the mind is tired, sometimes the body’s tired, sometimes the mind is excitable, the body’s worked up. Each time you bring the mind to the body, you find that it’s different from what it was the last time. So you have to make adjustments and figure out what’s the best way to bring these things together right now. So this really can be your space. And then once you feel settled in here, as one of the Thayajans says, think of it as being the only chair in your house, and you’re sitting in the chair. Everybody else who comes in has to stand, which means that they can’t really settle in. It’s up to you to decide who gets to stay and who doesn’t. If you let them take the chair away from you, then you’re the one who’s standing and you run in and out. In other words, if greed takes the chair, or anger or delusion takes the chair, you don’t have any place to sit down. You’re running around outside all the time. But remind yourself, this is your chair. This is your breath. This is the way you feel your body from within, and nobody else can feel this. The Buddha recommends that we settle here for two reasons. One is because it is a good place to stay. When you have a sense of well-being here, you’re not so much inclined to want to go looking out for snacks outside. You’ve got good food here inside, a good place to rest. You don’t have to lie down on park benches or on heating crates or on sidewalks. You’ve got a home here that you can stay in. The mind can put down a lot of its concerns. You realize how much of the world that you’re carrying around all the time. Now you can put it down. The other reason the Buddha has us stay here is because there’s a problem inside this part of your awareness that only you can feel, and that’s your suffering. The pain, the stress, the sense of being squeezed in someplace. We know that other people suffer too, but we don’t feel their suffering, and they don’t feel ours. We feel our own suffering. And as the Buddha said, the problem is coming from within as well. The cause of that suffering is something from within too. But you can also develop qualities from within that will take care of it. So the problem is right here, but the solution is right here as well. Because once the mind gets settled down, you begin to see the subtle movements of the mind that you missed before. And you can see how they’re causing stress. You latch on to them, and all of a sudden there’s a whole new world of stress that you created. So you let that go. And you learn to catch yourself more and more quickly as the process is beginning to develop. That means that you’re weighing yourself down less and less and less all the time. So right here is a good place to rest. Just make sure you don’t clutter it up with things from outside. And don’t let the things from outside come in and take over. Remember, this is your chair, the only chair in the house. Thoughts of yesterday come in, you say, “No thanks, you can go.” Thoughts of tomorrow come in, “No thanks, you can go.” It doesn’t mean that yesterday and tomorrow don’t matter at all, but it means that for the time being, you don’t need them. The mind needs to have a place where it can settle down and be its own person, put its burdens down, so it can learn how to stand tall, sit tall. And then from a sense of well-being, look at what’s going on inside. Why is it that even though everything we do is for the sake of pleasure, the sake of happiness, we end up creating so much suffering? Why are we doing it? As the Buddha said, it’s from ignorance. So we have the mind to settle down here so we can see what’s going on a lot more clearly. That way we’re better judges of what should and shouldn’t be done, what kind of actions really do lead to happiness and which ones don’t. Everything becomes a lot clearer inside. So we put down the burdens of the world, because remember that the real problems don’t come from the world. They come from within. And the more we focus on things outside and complain about things outside, the less we see what we’re doing ourselves. And so we miss the real cause. You want to see the real cause? You’ve got to put the world down for the time being and settle in right here. So this is not just an escape. Actually, you’re becoming more and more responsible, because what you are responsible for is your thoughts, your words, and your deeds. They come out of your mind. And you’ve let the mind just be overcome by greed, aversion, delusion, fear, jealousy, whatever. That’s being irresponsible. No matter how much you say you’re doing it to help other people, it’s still irresponsible. The responsible thing is to take care of your own mind first. To make sure that the source of your actions is good. And they’re bound to have a good impact out into the world. So there are lots of good reasons why you should try to get more and more sensitive to how you feel your mind from within, how you feel your body from within. So you can be more sensitive to the problems that you’re causing from within, but also have for it solving the problems from within. This is where the real work is done, and the results of the work are experienced. So get to know this place well.

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