A Well that Never Runs Dry

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Take a couple of good, long, deep, in-and-out breaths, and ask yourself what kind of breathing would feel good now. If you’re not sure, just go down through the body, starting at the back of the neck, down the shoulders and the arms, relaxing muscles as you go. Start at the back of the neck and again go down the spine, down through the pelvis, down through your legs. Sit straight, but relax everything you can. And it still allows you to sit up straight. And when you do that, you usually find that the breath will find a good rhythm. Think of the breath bathing the body. Every cell in your body is bathed with breath. This is healing, it’s nourishing. If you’ve been through a rough day, this is a good way to clean out all the damage, heal all the damage that’s been done. This is a way of showing goodwill for yourself. It gives you a source of well-being, a source of ease inside that doesn’t need to be dependent on conditions outside. It doesn’t need to depend on other people. It doesn’t need to depend on whether the economy is going good or bad, whether the world is peaceful or not peaceful. You’ve got this sense of well-being that you can tap into inside. And at the very least, it gives you some respite, gives you some time off. Better than that, though, it becomes a foundation inside, because you’re not going to have to do this only while you’re sitting here with your eyes closed. As you go through the day, you can check in on how your breathing is feeling. If you find any patterns of tension or blockages in the body, think of them dissolving away. When you have a sense of well-being inside, the body is less of a burden on the mind. It actually becomes a source of pleasure. A source of harmless pleasure. Because this is a pleasure that doesn’t involve harming anybody else, and at the same time it keeps your mind clear. There are a lot of pleasures you can gain through sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensations that actually cloud your mind. This one doesn’t. This one clears the mind. And in showing goodwill to yourself in this way, you’re also showing goodwill to others. You don’t need to lean on them so much for happiness. The mind has a tendency to feed. The Buddha talks about the different kinds of food for the mind. Part of it is just sensory impressions, your awareness of the senses. The mind feeds off of these things. That kind of food can be like potato chips. You can eat and eat and you never really get full, but then you do get full but you don’t feel right. And there’s the food of, as he said, our intentions. And these can be either skillful or unskillful. And what we’re doing as we meditate is to give ourselves some skillful intentions to feed off of. So we don’t have to feed off of people outside, things outside, situations outside. And that right there is an act of kindness to others. Because all too often, in our relationships with other people, we’re hoping that they will make us happy. And that’s too much of a demand to put on any relationship. If you can make yourself happy inside, then you don’t need to lean on other people so much. You’re more independent, and the other person is also a bit more independent, too. At the same time, you become more reliable inside, given the fact that you’ve got this source of energy. It’s a source of well-being inside. You become more reliable to others. It’s like those streams and wells that have water that depends not on the rain, but apparently comes up from under the mantle of the earth, whether there’s rain outside or no rain outside. Like the stream here in front of the monastery. Even through the worst drought, we’ve always had water. And it places throughout the earth. There are wells even in the middle of the desert that give water all the time. And as you can imagine, those become a source of well-being for a lot of people. Well, this is what you’ve developed inside as you develop those skills in meditation. The water that runs all the time, even in drought. If you have this sense of well-being that you can depend on, then other people can depend on you as well. You become more reliable. They don’t become the victims of your moods so much. So this is a good thing to do all around. This is what the Buddha was looking for, as he said when he was looking at the world. Before he went off into the forest, everything seemed to be laid claim to. Everywhere he went, there was conflict. It was like fish in a dwindling stream of water fighting one another over the last gulp of water. Of course, this fish gets that gulp and the other fish doesn’t get that gulp, but they both die. It’s pretty miserable. He wanted to look for a happiness that didn’t involve all that conflict and didn’t end in death. And he found it inside. It starts with the practice of generosity and moves on through the process of practice of virtue and then through the meditation. In each of these ways you find happiness in a way that doesn’t need to take anything away from anyone else. It’s actually a gift to the world. That kind of happiness is something that really should be treasured. This is one of the reasons why we bow down to the Buddha, because he has us respect within ourselves the desire for true happiness, the desire for harmless happiness. Not only that it’s real, but also showing us how to find that happiness inside. This is why meditation is such a good thing to be doing every day, every day. It becomes that well that flows with water all the time, even in drought. Refreshing for you and refreshing for the people around you.

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