The Goldsmith

March 16, 2025

Start with thoughts of goodwill. A wish for happiness. Your happiness, the happiness of others. As we all know, goodwill is the first of the Brahma-viharas, and the last is equanimity. And sometimes people interpret that as meaning that equanimity is the highest of them, the one you’re trying to get to. But the Buddha never taught equanimity on its own. It always has to be based on goodwill, or the other factors of concentration, to make sure that it doesn’t turn into nothing, doing nothing at all. That’s when the Buddha gives instructions on the factors for awakening. He says the factor that’s always useful is mindfulness, keeping in mind what you’re supposed to be doing. And one of the things you want to keep in mind is you’re trying to bring the mind into a balanced state of concentration. You have to figure out first where you are out of balance, and then bring things back into balance. And the factors like concentration, calm, equanimity, those are for times when the mind is hyperactive. Got too much energy, so you would do what you can to calm things down. So right now try to breathe, if you find that your mind is hyperactive, breathe in a calming way. As for whatever comes up, try to not get upset by it. It’s in cases like this where the Buddha would teach his son to make his mind like earth. People toss trash on the earth, but the earth doesn’t get pulsed by it, doesn’t worry about it. That’s the kind of equanimity you want. But if your mind is already dull and lacking in energy, that’s not what you want at all. You need something that’s more energizing, in which case the Buddha recommends analyzing what’s going on in the mind, trying to figure it out, what you should be doing, what you should be abandoning, and actually doing the abandoning and doing the developing, until you get a sense of energy that comes from that. So equanimity isn’t always the best thing to have. It has its time and place. And even when it has its time and place, it has to be mixed with other things as well. This morning we talked about the qualities of what he said you develop when you deal with other people, and you have the intent to help them. Equanimity is one of them, but it can’t be the only one. If you’re just equanimous about whatever, then you’ll let people do whatever they want, and they’re never going to learn. If you raised your children with equanimity and nothing else, there’s not much they would learn. You have to be harsh with them sometimes, you have to be strict with them, you have to be proactive. So equanimity is just one of many good qualities. You also have to have kindness, you have to have good will, endurance, and learn the right time and place to reach at these. The Buddha gives the analogy of a goldsmith. The goldsmith sometimes puts the gold into the fire, sometimes he takes it out and blows on it to cool it down, and sometimes he just looks at it. If you were to put it in the fire all the time, the gold would get burnt. If you just sat there and looked at it, nothing would happen. If you blew on it all the time, it would cool down, but it would harden, but it would harden into what? Where it was to begin with. So the goldsmith has to learn how to balance all of these activities so it’s just right, so he can get the gold ornament that he wants. Because you do have a purpose in being a goldsmith. In the same way when you meditate you do have a purpose. Some people say you should try to do nothing at all, don’t have any idea of your going anywhere. But the Buddha is not one of those people. He very much had a goal in mind in his quest, and he found it through a lot of effort, but also learning how to balance his effort out with concentration and equanimity. Because that’s what the image of the goldsmith is. The image stands for the effort is putting the gold in the fire. Blowing on it is getting the mind into concentration to cool it down. And in equanimity it’s like looking at it to see what needs to be done. So you balance all these three. Because if you do nothing but get the mind still and concentrated, nothing happens. If you just look at it, nothing happens. Spend all the time making a lot of effort, you get worn out because you have to stop and reflect. Remember what the Buddha said about nourishing the Dhamma. You start out with commitment, but then you also have to reflect. If you just work, work, work at the Dhamma without looking at the results, you wear yourself out. You have no sense of what’s just right. Because the path, when the Buddha calls it a middle way, it’s not only middle, but it’s also just right. And that requires a lot of discernment and a lot of commitment and reflection. So just becoming a goldsmith is a skill that takes some time and you need a lot of powers of observation. Becoming a good meditator requires the same qualities. We’re not just here to watch or to be aware. We’re here to be aware of what we’re doing that’s causing suffering and how we can stop it. And that does require putting the gold into the fire sometimes. So be ready with your full range of skills and learn what’s the right time and what’s the right place for them. Realizing that equanimity is one of those skills, but it’s not the only one, it’s not the ultimate skill. It’s one that has to find its place in a complete course of training.

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