The World You Create (outdoors)

April 8, 2018

Ask everybody to meditate and close your eyes and focus on your breath. Watch your breath coming in, watch your breath going out. As for anything else that might come into the mind, just let it go. Any sounds that come into the ears, let them just pass right on. You don’t have to catch them. You don’t have to put up any barriers to them. Just let them do their own thing. While you do your thing, which is to try to get the mind to be concentrated, focused on one thing. Because the concentrated mind has a lot of power. It’s the unconcentrated mind that’s running around all the time. That’s the weak mind. If you want your mind to be strong, you want to be able to center it and keep it centered, regardless of whatever else comes up. So try this right now with the breath. Watch the breath coming in, try to make it as comfortable as you can. You can try long breathing to start out with, to make the breath really clear. And if long breathing feels good, keep it up. If not, you can change. Make it shorter, deeper, more shallow, heavier, lighter, faster, slower. See what feels good right now. And keep on top of the knees of the body because they’ll change after a while. Certain kind of breathing which felt good to begin with may not feel so good afterwards. So you can change. Find a comfortable place in the present moment to help with your power as a concentration. We live in a world where things come at us from all directions, and the mind needs some resilience. And there are two ways we can do this. One is to put up protective barriers, and the other is to generate strength that goes back into the world. Send back positive energy, make up for all the negative energy that comes in. The positive energy, of course, is generosity. When the mind is still, when the mind feels strong, when you’re coming from a position of strength, it’s a lot easier to be generous. When you’re feeling weak, when you’re feeling threatened, then it’s a lot, it’s very easy to get stingy, it’s very easy to put up barriers to other people. This is what we see happening around us all the time. The media keeps sending us news that there’s this danger out there, this group of people, that group of people, and people start putting up barriers. And in a world where there’s a lot of barriers, in a world where there’s no generosity, it’s not a world worth living in. John Furong, my teacher, used to say when he was a child, what he liked about Songkran was all the food booths. Because as a child he would go around, they wouldn’t wait to set them up in the monastery, they’d set them up throughout the village. The child could go around, there was free food. And he realized that it’s generosity that makes life a better place to live, the human world a better place to live. So this is one of the ways that you can take this new year. The Thais have lots of new years. They have January 1st, of course, and they have the Chinese New Year. There’s the old traditional Thai New Year, which is in March, and then there’s the Indian New Year, which is Songkran. They’ve taken them all. And we can take each of them as an opportunity to say, well, the year so far hasn’t been going well, here’s one more chance to start the year up right. So you might think about how to be more generous as you go through the rest of the new year as a way of making the world around you a better place to live. Because it’s not only the receivers or the recipients of generosity who benefit, the people who give benefit as well. Your mind becomes a larger, more encompassing mind with fewer and fewer boundaries. You’re not so concerned about your own little needs and you begin to see there are needs out there as well. And you do have the resources inside to share. This applies not only to physical things or material things, but also to your time. You can learn to be more generous with your time, more generous with your knowledge, especially more generous with your forgiveness. It seems like the world is becoming a more and more unforgiving place. People are tracking other people down, trying to settle old scores. We see this from the top of the society on down. And what does that do? It makes everybody less and less easy to live with one another. It makes the human world a less pleasant place to be. You realize that everybody has made mistakes and you go around trying to settle old scores. What you end up doing is creating some new bad scores. So if there’s any way that you can be forgiving of the people who’ve wronged you, that’s an excellent form of generosity. It costs nothing. And for some reason it’s one of the hardest forms of generosity there is. So you might want to take this opportunity to stop and think, “Where are some areas in your life where you can be more forgiving of other people?” And actually give them that gift. You’re giving yourself a gift as well. That’s the way of improving the world by sending out better energy into the world. As for protecting yourself, putting up a barrier. It’s not putting up a barrier against other people. It’s putting up a barrier against your own unskillful actions. The Buddha said the two qualities that protect the world more than anything else are a sense of shame and a sense of compunction. Shame here is not the shame that’s the opposite of pride, where you feel bad about yourself. That you’re an unworthy person. It’s the kind of shame that’s the opposite of shamelessness, where you feel, “If I can get away with something, I might as well just get away with it. Other people are doing it. Why can’t I?” It’s that kind of thinking that tears the world down. But if you can think about the good people whose eyes you would like to look good in, realize that you’d be ashamed to do something that they wouldn’t approve of. That’s a protection. That’s a healthy state of mind. Because it goes together with pride and self-esteem. In other words, you realize that certain kind of behaviors are beneath you. And even if other people are engaging in them, you don’t have to engage in them. And that way you’re putting out less bad energy into the world. The other quality is compunction. You think about the consequences of your actions. Compunction is the opposite of apathy. Apathy says, “I don’t care what the consequences of my actions are. I want to do what I do. Right now.” But if you do that, then you do end up having to live with the consequences. You can’t escape them. As the Buddha said, the sign of wisdom is if you see something that you like to do, but it’s going to give bad results, you’re able to talk yourself out of doing it. In the same way, if you see something you don’t like to do that’s going to give good results in the long term, you talk yourself into doing it. The wisdom in being able to talk yourself into doing things that will give good long-term consequences is where the rubber hits the road. In other words, you can read all kinds of wisdom books, but it’s the wisdom in dealing with your own mind that really matters. And this way you make yourself a better person. You make your actions better. The world around you becomes a better place. So instead of allowing the media to define our world, we say, “Okay, we’re going to define our world for ourselves. We’re going to make this a world where there’s a lot of generosity. We’ll make this a world where we at least will be ashamed to do behavior that’s unworthy of us. And we think about the long-term consequences of our actions. We have these three qualities, generosity, a healthy sense of shame, a healthy sense of compunction. We do make this a better world to live in. So regardless of what other people are doing, the world we create through our actions is going to be a good world. And that’s the world we take with us. This world, this body, this body wears down and is going to have to leave this world, but it’s going to find another world. And the other worlds that are open to it will depend on the actions you do right here and right now. So think of the various ways you could be more generous in your life. If you don’t have the material wealth to be generous in that way, think about the knowledge you have, the time you have, and your ability to be forgiving. That way you improve the world around you. And through a sense of shame, a sense of compunction, you protect the world from your unskillful habits. And so the world that you go to, the world that you create now, and that you take with you when you go, will be a good world. A world that’s good to live in. We can do this with our actions. Having a celebration like this every year reminds us that time is passing away. There’s not much time left to us, even if you’re still young. Forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years, that’s not much time. It goes very quickly. So you want to make sure you make the best use of your time, because otherwise time eats you up, as it eats itself up. So try to make sure that you have something good to show for it. When the body gets eaten up, you still have a treasure of goodness inside that doesn’t get eaten up by time. That’s a sign of being truly wise.

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