Bring Your Mind Together (outdoors)

August 19, 2018

Okay, let’s sit and meditate for a few minutes. Close your eyes and think thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is a wish for true happiness, your true happiness and the happiness of everyone else. Because true happiness is something that’s found inside, which means that your true happiness doesn’t have to take anything away from anyone else’s. There’s no conflict. But you also have to reflect that true happiness comes from people’s actions. What you do will lead to your true happiness or away from your true happiness. The same with other people. So simply the wish for true happiness is not enough. You have to act on it. That means two things. One is that you can have goodwill for people who’ve been behaving in a very bad way because you’re hoping that they’re going to change their ways. The same for you. That’s the second meaning. You have to act on it. So when you’ve thought, “May I be truly happy, may all beings be truly happy,” then you get to work. The work right here is the meditation. We’re going to focus on the breath. So take a couple of long, deep, in-and-out breaths. So notice where you feel the breathing process in the body. And then you’re going to ask yourself, “Is it comfortable?” If long breathing feels comfortable, keep it up. If not, you can change the rhythm, you can change the texture. You can make it faster or slower. Or try in fast, out slow. And the same with long and short, heavy or light, deep or shallow. Try to see what the right combination for your body is right now. Energizing if you’re feeling tired. Calming if you’re feeling overexcited. And keep special watch on your thoughts. Make sure they don’t go wandering away from the breath. If you’re thinking about the breath, that’s fine. But for the time being, thinking about anything else is off limits. So if you find yourself thinking about something else, just drop that thought and you’ll be right back at the breath. If it happens again, drop the thought again, you’ll be back at the breath again. No matter how many times it happens, just keep dropping the thought and coming back. Each time you come back, reward yourself with a breath that feels especially good. Think of the breathing as a whole body process. All your nerves, all your blood vessels are involved in the breathing. Anywhere that feels tight or anywhere that feels deprived of breath energy, allow that part to loosen up, open up. So it can be nourished too. And when the breath feels good, try to maintain it. You may find that the needs of the body will change. The kind of breathing that felt good five minutes ago suddenly doesn’t feel so good anymore. Well, try to be on top of that. Adjust the breath again. And then when there is a sense of comfort, think of it spreading to the different parts of the body. Think of it going down the back, out the legs, down the front of the body, through the navel. Down the shoulders, out to the tips of the fingers, all around the head. Think of the breath nourishing your eyes, nourishing your ears, nourishing your brain, all the way down through the nervous system. Think of it nourishing your heart, nourishing your lungs. Think of it nourishing the stomach and the intestines. Think of it nourishing the muscles throughout the body. And see if you can breathe in a way that the whole body feels nourished all at once, and you’re aware of the whole body being nourished. We’re trying to give the mind a good place to rest. But not just rest like when you’re sleeping. You’re resting, but you’re trying to be mindful and alert at the same time. Because these are the real qualities that we’re after. This is the ability to remember something. In this case, you’re remembering to stay with the breath, not to wander off. Alertness is watching what you’re actually doing. And then there’s a quality called ardency, where you try to do this well. Put your whole heart into doing it well. You’re not just going through the motions. After all, your true well-being depends on getting the mind under your control. And here you are, trying to get it under control through mindfulness, through alertness, through your ardency. Because these are the things we live with, our mind states, our body, our breath, our feelings. And you want to get some control over them. Give them a sense that they feel good together. So that whatever the task you have, everything inside you is working together on the task and not working at cross-purposes. Because all too often, we’re the ones who destroy the goodness that we could create, simply because our minds are not totally in unison. Part of the mind wants to do good, and other parts want to do something else. That’s where our goodness comes only in bits and pieces. It’s not solid. And our mind is in bits and pieces like this because we lack mindfulness. It’s so easy to forget. We’re thinking about one thing, and all of a sudden we find ourselves thinking about something else, and we have no idea how we went from one topic to the next. It’s as if someone came with a big burlap bag and just slipped it over our heads and tossed us off someplace else. We come out of the bag and we’re in an entirely different place. It’s because of a lapse of mindfulness. A brief moment of just passing out, and then you’re in another thought world. It’s because we get so easily distracted and we’re so forgetful. This is one of the reasons why mindfulness is so important. Mindfulness is not just being aware of whatever comes up. That’s more the duty of alertness. And even then, alertness has to be focused. It should be focused on what you’re doing. What are the results of what you’re doing? What’s motivating you to do those things? Mindfulness is what remembers. What should you be doing? The shoulds here are things that you can choose. As the Buddha said, you should try to comprehend suffering. You should try to abandon its cause. You should try to realize its cessation, and you should try to develop the path if you want to put an end to suffering. Notice the choice is yours. You can decide that you haven’t suffered enough yet. There are still a few other things I’d like to take care of first before I tackle the problem of suffering. But if you really do want to put an end to suffering, this is what you’ve got to do. It’s not that he’s imposing these duties on you just because he wants to. It’s because he saw from his own experience that this is what you’ve got to do. So these are the duties that you keep in mind. Right now we’re trying to develop mindfulness, which is part of the path. We’re trying to develop concentration. We’ve got to remember that, and also remember not to let the mind wander off to anything else, and to remember to breathe in a way that feels really good, because right concentration has to have a sense of ease and refreshment in order to be right. So you create that sense of ease and refreshment by staying with the breath. If you jump around all the time, the breath can very easily get rough and jumpy. But if you’re smoothly with the breath, the breath begins to smooth out too. So it’s the quality of your attention. Try to make your attention smooth and continuous, and the breath will smooth out and get soothing as well. That’s where we’re beginning to get into right concentration. There’s got to be a sense of well-being. The sense of well-being is what pulls the different members of the mind’s committee together, because they all want happiness, they all want well-being. And when there’s no well-being in the mind, they can have all kinds of opinions, and you don’t really know who to trust. But when you’ve learned that you can create a sense of well-being simply by the way you breathe, you’ve got some evidence. This is how it’s done. And the more obstreperous members of the committee began to realize that they were wrong. They thought that happiness came from jumping around and going for the next pleasure, and then the next, and then the next. Whereas now they can see that a sense of well-being comes when you can say smoothly with the breath. And it’s free. All you need to do is develop some skill around the way you breathe. And there it is, a sense of well-being. You don’t even have to ask. You just say, “This is what I want. I know how to do this.” Which means you’re less dependent on situations outside. If your happiness is dependent on things outside, then this has to be just that way, that has to be just this way, and it’s very fragile. It’s like a hothouse happiness. You can be happy only in the hothouse, just like a plant that’s grown in the hothouse can survive only in the hothouse. As soon as you leave the hothouse, it dies. As soon as you leave the just right conditions that you created for yourself, your happiness dies. That’s not a happiness you can depend on. And when you can’t depend on your happiness, you can’t depend on your mind. Because the mind is going to go for pleasure. If it can’t find it this way, it’s going to find it someplace else. So give it a good place to look for pleasure. Tame the members of your committee. Not with a whip, but with a breath. As the breath gives them all a place to gather around, that gives a sense of unity, a unity of purpose. You want to find happiness not any which way, you want to find happiness the way that’s wise, causes no harm to you, no harm to anybody else. So when you can create this sense of well-being, that puts you more solidly on the path. The path where? The path to the end of suffering. As the Buddha pointed out, there’s suffering in the world, but the most important suffering is the suffering you create for yourself, and it’s unnecessary. It’s through your lack of skill that you do that. If you don’t develop skill, you’re going to keep on causing yourself to suffer. But if you develop that skill, then you find that when you’re not creating any suffering for yourself, there’s nothing weighing down the mind. Because the things of the world just fall away, fall away. They don’t lean on the mind, they don’t oppress the mind. It’s the mind’s own lack of skill that creates the suffering that weighs it down. So develop some skill here. And you’ll find that it hugely lightens the burdens off the mind.

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