Responsible

April 1, 2022

Okay, get into position. Get your body into position. Get your mind into position. The body in position. Sitting up straight. Your hands in the lap. Right hand on top of your left. Close your eyes. The mind in position. Start with thoughts of goodwill to remind yourself of why you’re meditating. You’re looking for happiness that harms no one. You’re responsible in your search for happiness. And you realize the ideal form of happiness is one that comes from within. It doesn’t have to take anything away from anyone else. And that’s what we’re doing as we meditate. We’re looking within for our happiness. Spreading thoughts of goodwill is also a way of putting the mind in a good mood. You’re here with no animosity toward anyone at all. That thought should lift the mind. You’re lifting it to a higher level. You’re lifting your heart to a higher level as well. Because it feels good to know that you’re happy. Happiness is totally harmless. After you spread some thoughts of goodwill around, then you can focus in on your breath. Take a couple of good, long, deep in and out breaths. Notice where you feel the breathing in the body. Can I ask you something? What rhythm of breathing would feel best right now? Experiment for a while to see what options there are. There’s long in, long out. Short in, short out. Long in, short out. Short in, long out. And many variations on that. Try to familiarize yourself with how the body feels right now, what it needs in terms of the breath. Where you can feed your sense of well-being inside like this. Unless you’re going to need to depend on things outside. Unless you’re going to be feeding outside. Which is an important principle. As I said, we’re looking for happiness in a responsible way. Some people accuse people who meditate of being irresponsible, of not caring about the world. They say that we should straighten out the world first, then we straighten out our minds. But you look at the human world, even if you made a perfect society, human beings are imperfect. They wouldn’t be happy in a perfect society. One time Mara came to the Buddha and said, “Instead of being Buddha, why don’t you rule the world?” The Buddha asked, “Well, why do you say that?” Mara said, “You could take the Himalayas,”the whole range of the Himalayas, “you could turn them into gold with your power.” But as the Buddha said, “Even two times the Himalayas”would not be enough for one person’s desires.” There’s no way the world is ever going to be perfect. In the meantime, you have unfinished business inside. As long as you go around with greed, aversion, and delusion, even quiet in the mind, you know that it could come out at any time. So you need the skills so that you can master these defilements. Make sure they don’t cause any harm, either to yourself or to others. So this is why meditation is responsible. You’re taking care of your main responsibility. It’s something that no one else can do for you. Even when you help other people, the rest you can do is help them from outside. As the Buddha pointed out, our sufferings come from within. Even if they’re in miserable circumstances, the fact that we have greed, aversion, and delusion, that’s what makes us suffer. Not the circumstances outside. You could live in perfectly fine circumstances and still suffer. But the real skill is learning how to be free from suffering, even when things are bad outside. So look inside yourself. Look inside to see what your resources are. That’s when we’re meditating. There are three kinds of fabrication. The Buddha says if you fabricate your experience, ignorance is going to lead to suffering. But if you do it with knowledge, it’s the path to the end of suffering. So you’ve got breath, which is the bodily fabrication, which you’re focusing on right now. And then there’s verbal fabrication, directed thought and evaluation. That’s when you raise the topic of the breath to make it foremost in the mind. And then you talk to yourself about it. Is the breath comfortable? Is it not comfortable? What could be done to make it more comfortable? When it is comfortable, how do you maintain it? You don’t just say, “Well, concentration is impermanent.” “A sense of ease is impermanent. I’ll just let it go.” The Buddha said concentration is something you have to work at. Remember how mindfulness becomes a governing principle in the mind. If something skillful is not there yet in the mind, you give rise to it. Once it’s there, you maintain it. So how do you maintain that sense of ease right now? Get very sensitive to how the breath feels. Learn how to savor the breath. And then when it feels solid, ask yourself, “What can you do with the breath?” We’re not here just for the pleasure. We’re here for the understanding. And so one of the ways you learn how to understand this feeling of pleasure is to spread it around. That accomplishes several things. One, it makes the body a more comfortable place to stay. It helps you to inhabit the present moment more fully. So think of that comfort spreading through the body. It’s in this way that you do find a sense of well-being inside. That’s not the ultimate. This is simply a step in that direction. But it’s already teaching an important lesson. That we have potentials inside that we don’t take advantage of. If we do take care of our inside potentials, then we’re less likely to cause harm outside. John Lee has the example of someone who has a piece of farmland, but doesn’t farm it, just lets it grow up in weeds. It’s like crops on somebody else’s property. That’s what it’s like when we’re trying to find happiness based on other people, on things outside. And of course, there are going to be issues. As the Buddha said, this is what we all have in common as beings, is that we have to feed. When we need to feed, we need to lay claim for part of the world. And our claims often overlap. But if you can take what is really your own territory inside you, your sense of the body as you feel it from within, your sense of the mind as you feel it from within, and cultivate that, then that lessens the need to go out and get into trouble with other people, to fight over what they claim is theirs. That’s bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication. Then there’s mental fabrication, perceptions and feelings. You want to notice how you perceive the breath coming into the body. What image do you hold in mind? What image is most peaceful to give rise to feelings of well-being, refined feelings of well-being? In the beginning, we start out with the image that the breath is something coming in from outside. After all, the air comes in through the nose. But as the mind begins to settle down, you begin to realize, well, what causes the air to come in? It’s the movement of the breath energy in the body. So the breath actually starts inside. So hold that perception in mind, and ask yourself, where does the breath seem to originate in the body? And when it spreads through the body, does it spread smoothly? Does it run into any patterns of tension, any blockages? If it does, can you think of those blockages dissolving away? And then you can try an even more refined perception, which is that every cell in the body is breathing. The breath originates every place in the body all at once. Each cell breathing in, each cell breathing out. And as you hold that perception in mind, you have to change your awareness of the body. So you’re not spotlighting any one point. Your awareness is diffuse throughout the body. When it’s diffuse like this, like the diffuse light after a sunset, as the sun is setting, it will highlight certain points in the landscape. And other places are thrown into darkness. But once the sun sets, everything is allowed to glow with its own evening glow. And your awareness is all around. And when it’s all around like this, then you can see what’s happening inside the body, we see what’s happening inside the mind. This isn’t the point of getting the mind to settle down like this. You see things that you didn’t see before. And you see them in different angles that you often would close out before. So learn to familiarize yourself with how you fabricate your sense of the body, your sense of the mind, right here in the present moment. And the more knowledge you bring here, the more you can get out of your inner resources. And that’s your need from outside. And the more you can find inside like this, the more you cultivate your inner resources, the more you’ll be able to offer to others. Again, with the John Lee. Once you have crops growing in your own property, you find that you have more than enough. You have enough to sell, you have enough to give away. So instead of living in the world and just taking in, taking in, taking in, you change the dynamic, you’re radiating good things out. And it’s in this way that your meditation becomes a gift, not only to yourself, but also to the world.

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