Noble Happiness (outdoors)

July 17, 2022

Let’s start with thoughts of goodwill. Goodwill is the wish for true happiness, your true happiness, not the true happiness of others. Because true happiness comes from within, there’s no conflict there. When you’re meditating, what you’re doing is taking your inner resources for happiness and developing them. Because all too often we look for happiness outside. But as the Buddha said, there are lots of dangers with happiness. Things we like in terms of sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensations. They come and they go and they’re not much really under our control. When the Buddha taught the Way to the End of Suffering, he noted that one of the causes for suffering is our craving for what he called sensuality. That’s our fascination with beautiful sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensations. But he also noted that if you don’t get any pleasure that’s an alternative, you just keep going back to them, because they seem to be the only alternative to pain. So when he taught his Middle Way, he taught another type of pleasure, the pleasure that comes from inhabiting your body, using your awareness to fill the body, and then working with the energies in the body that you feel. So they work together to create a sense of well-being, what he calls form, the body as you experience it from inside. And that’s something that doesn’t have to depend on a lot of other things outside. It does depend, to some extent. After all, he himself discovered, after he’d been starving himself, essentially, for six years, that he didn’t have the strength to do this kind of concentration. So he learned that he had to eat in moderation to get his physical strength back. But aside from that, when you develop the skills of meditation, you can find a sense of well-being inside no matter what things are like outside. It also puts you in a position where you can begin to look at what the Buddha said are the causes for suffering and the suffering itself. He says we suffer because of the way we cling. We cling to things because we think we’re getting nourishment from them. He says we’re not really. And the reason we cling is because we crave. We like our clingings; we like our cravings. So you need something else to step back from your clingings and cravings. You need something else to step back from your clingings and cravings. So you can look at them more objectively. You need this alternative. And this is the alternative, being sensitive to the breath. The breath talks about the breath not as a tactile sensation. In other words, it’s not the air coming in and touching the nose or the lips or whatever when you breathe in and breathe out. It’s the feeling of energy inside the body. You’ll notice that the chest rises, the abdomen rises as you breathe in, they fall down as you breathe out. That’s the most obvious movement in the body. There are other movements in the body as well. And the more you can get your mind quiet and still, the more you can see the more subtle movements. And you begin to realize there’s a flow of energy that goes through the whole nervous system each time you breathe in and each time you breathe out. When you can think of that flow of energy being easy and smooth, then you can develop a sense of well-being inside. So try to sensitize yourself as you breathe in. Where do you feel the breath? And does it feel good? You can change the rhythm of breathing if you like. You can try longer breathing, shorter breathing, deeper, more shallow, heavier, lighter. It’s all free. And you’re not taking anything away from anyone else and you’re not trying to hold on to things that other people can take away from you. The Buddha pointed out the drawbacks to sensuality. He had many different analogies. One of them is it’s like a hawk. There’s a piece of meat and other hawks and other raptors see that and they come after it. And the hawk is flying away. He’s got to fight them off. And usually he has to let go of the meat if he doesn’t want to get killed. In the same way, we latch on to something that’s our source for happiness outside. Other people see it, they get jealous, they want it too. But when you’re finding a sense of well-being from the way you breathe, nobody can know. You’re the one who knows. You’re just sitting there breathing. But you find that you can breathe in ways that really do feel nourishing inside. There’s another image that’s similar of a man who goes up into a tree to pick some fruit, to eat the fruit. Another man comes along and he doesn’t know how to climb the tree, but he does have an axe. He says, “Well, I know how to cut the tree down.” “And I can get the fruit I want.” And this points more to the fact that a lot of our sensual pleasures depend on society being a certain way. The economy has to be a certain way. Politics has to be a certain way. There has to be a certain amount of peace in the system. But there are people who want to destroy the system because they get some short-term benefit from it. And if your happiness depends on the system like this, again, it’s going to be in danger at some point. It’s not all that secure. So you’re a lot more secure trying to find a sense of well-being inside. As I said earlier, the Buddha said that we suffer in our clinging and we suffer because of our craving. He says these are noble truths. The other two noble truths are seeing that there’s a cessation of suffering that comes when you let go of the craving, and you can find that cessation by developing a path of practice, which is basically virtue, concentration, and discernment. He calls these noble truths. You might wonder, “Well, what’s noble about suffering? What’s noble about craving?” The suffering and craving in themselves are not noble. What’s noble is your realization that you’re suffering because of the things you hold on to. You’re willing to look at your attachments and say, “Maybe I should let go, at least let go strategically of the things that are causing me to suffer.” And you’re also learning how to step back from your cravings and look at them objectively. And that’s a noble act. Otherwise, we’re like that commercial they used to have for Sprite, where it said, “Obey your thirst.” Wherever our thirst takes us, we go along. Whatever craving whispers into our ears, we believe it. But now the Buddha’s asking you to step back, grow up, take a noble attitude. He’s asking you to take a noble attitude toward your clingings and cravings. Often before he taught the Four Noble Truths, he would teach what he called a graduated discourse. They got people in the right mood in order to be able to make this step of taking a noble approach to their suffering. So first he started talking about generosity, how good it is to be generous. Because with generosity there comes a sense of inner wealth. You realize that there are certain things that you have more than enough of and you’re happy to share. That attitude creates a really good space inside the mind. It’s like living in a big, spacious house. If you have trouble being generous, it’s like living in a tiny, narrow house. There’s hardly any room to move around. After talking about how good it is to be generous, the Buddha would talk about how good it is to be virtuous. In other words, you make up your mind you’re not going to do anything that’s going to harm anyone else. You’re not going to kill, steal, cheat, tell lies, engage in illicit sex, take intoxicants. As you follow these precepts and learn how to some restraint in these areas, you get a sense of your own worth as a person. You feel that there’s some nobility in your motives in engaging with other people. You can live with a clear conscience and realize you haven’t harmed anybody. After talking about generosity and virtue, he talked about the rewards. The rewards in this life, the rewards in the next life. Recording in progress. When you’re generous and virtuous, people trust you. Whatever wealth you have is a lot more solid than the wealth you gain in other ways. You can think of all the pleasures that you can enjoy because of that wealth. And then the Buddha would talk about the drawbacks of sensuality. As I said earlier, you place yourself in a weak position, and by sensuality he means our fascination with sensual thoughts more than with the sensual pleasures themselves. He fantasizes about sensuality for hours and hours. But what does it get us? Another one of the Buddha’s images is like a dog gnawing on a bone that doesn’t have any meat. All it gets is the taste of its own saliva. And the fact that your happiness depends on situations outside being a certain way, people treating you in a certain way, allowing you to enjoy sensuality in a certain way, you realize how precarious it is. That’s the point the Buddha says when you’re ready for the Noble Truths, saying it might be good to step back from sensuality, see if there’s an alternative way to find happiness, a more responsible way to find happiness, a happiness that doesn’t take anything away from anyone else, doesn’t harm you, doesn’t harm anybody. That’s when you’re ready to learn about the Noble Path. And what we’re doing right now is to get the mind concentrated, getting a sense of inhabiting the body from within with a sense of well-being. That’s the center of the path, when the mind settles down like this. It’s not so hungry anymore. And then you can look at your old attachments and begin to realize, okay, you went after them because of the pleasure they gave, but the pleasure they gave is so meager and so unreliable compared to the pleasure that can come when you master concentration. This puts the mind in a position where it is willing to let go of some of its attachments, some of its cravings, and find a happiness that lies deeper still, something that doesn’t depend on conditions at all. This is why this is the Noble Path. You’re looking for happiness in a way that’s responsible. You’re careful not to harm anybody. You don’t harm yourself, you don’t harm other people. You find your well-being in a way that’s completely blameless. And then you use that well-being to understand yourself. Why is it that the mind holds on to things that are actually causing it suffering? It’s because it doesn’t see clearly. And the reason it doesn’t see clearly is because it’s so hungry all the time. Well, you feed it well and maybe it will begin to be willing to step back from some of its attachments and find that it’s a lot lighter without them. It’s like someone going camping. If you think of all the pleasures you want to take along with you, you need this, you need that, you need this, you need that, then you weigh yourself down and you can hardly walk. But if you realize there’s a pleasure that you can gain that doesn’t require that you carry a lot of things around with you, and things don’t have to be just like this, just like that, the society doesn’t have to be stable. People don’t have to be nice to you. You can find happiness anywhere. In that case, you can go camping with just a minimum amount of gear. It means you can go far. There are a lot more places you can stay and a lot more things you can see that you couldn’t see otherwise. So as the Buddha said, learn to see renunciation. This is what it is. You renounce your need for sensual pleasures, but you don’t deny yourself. You have pleasure inside. Then you learn to see renunciation as rest, renunciation as peace, as well-being. It’s not a deprivation. It’s just being more responsible about how you look for your happiness. You find that the happiness that results is a lot better all around. So take advantage of this opportunity. You’ve got some time just to watch your breath come in. Watch your breath go out and ask yourself, “What kind of breathing feels best right now?” See what you can learn about how you can find a sense of well-being simply by sitting here with your eyes closed, sitting under a tray, breathing. Then you realize you’ve got a skill that you can take anywhere you want to go.

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