A Gift of Stillness

January 22, 2023

Today our Sunday meditation class is going to be devoted to a specific purpose, a special purpose. The Crown Princess of Thailand is sick in the hospital. She’s been in the hospital unconscious for the past month. And so people all over Thailand, Thais all over the world, and well-wishers all over the world, have been sending their good wishes. And the people ordaining, dedicating the merit of their ordination to her. So we’re going to dedicate her to meditation. The notice that went out said that we’re going to be praying for her, which is not a good translation of the Pali word that they use in Thai for meditation, bhavana. We’re going to be meditating for her. What that means is we’re going to be dedicating the goodness that comes from meditation to her recovery. She’s done a lot for Thailand. And it’s a shame that at such a young age she’s been struck down like this. So we hope that she recovers, both in body and in mind. So when you meditate, dedicate the merit to someone who’s alive, or someone who’s passed away. It’s the same process. You start by sending thoughts of goodwill in that person’s direction. And then you put those thoughts down and you focus in on your meditation. Then at the end of the meditation you send thoughts of goodwill again. By this time, through the power of your concentration, your goodwill should be a lot stronger. And John Sowat made a comment like this one time. He said you start with thoughts of goodwill for yourself, to basically clear the decks. If you have any issues with anyone in the world, you say right now I have no issues with anyone. So if in the course of the meditation anybody’s face appears in your mind, you can send thoughts of goodwill, regardless of what issues you have with that person. So in the beginning, goodwill is for your own sake, so that you get the mind to settle down. Then when your concentration is stronger, at the end the goodwill is for others. You think of whatever peace and well-being you felt during the meditation, and you dedicate it to them. And the force of your focus is what gives it strength. The Thais talk a lot about what they call the currents of the mind, kasachit. And the mind is sending out currents all the time. It’s sending out wavelengths all the time. If your mind is thinking about a lot of things, it’s all pretty erratic. It sounds like a radio with a lot of static, fizzing and popping. What you want to do is direct it so that it is one consistent current. That’s the kind of current that has strength. The Buddha gives the image of the mind being like a river. And if the river doesn’t have any outlets along the side, the current can remain strong. But if you open up an outlet, say you want to put some water in a rice field, so you dig a little channel off from one side of the river into the rice field, and then there’s a rice field on the other side of the river, you dig a channel there, you end up digging a lot of channels off to the side. Then the strength of the current gets weakened. That was the Buddha’s image for the hindrances, that they weaken the current of the mind. So as we meditate, we’re going to make the mind one. No thoughts of sensual desire, no thoughts of ill will, no sloth and torpor, no restlessness and anxiety, and no doubts about what you’re doing. You want to be confident that when your mind is one, it really is one. And it’s in that single focus that it gains strength. So focus on the breath, and keep on the breath. No matter what other thoughts come up, you don’t have to get involved. Our problem is that we find our thinking interesting. We think that all our thoughts are valuable. Every thought that pops into the mind, we look into it and say, “What’s this about? What’s that about?” It’s like we have a little present. We open up the present, then we fall into the present, fall into the box. And it takes us someplace else. So no matter what presence your thoughts are giving you, remind yourself the value of the mind is in its singleness. That’s when the mind is one, that it has high value. We tend to think that a mind with lots of thoughts is a creative mind. And in some areas of life it is useful to have that kind of thinking, that where lots of different thoughts come to your mind. But for the health of the mind itself, you need to make it one. And when the value goes up, the closer and closer it is to really being one. You can think of durian in a market. Durian is one of the more expensive fruits. But if you have lots and lots of durian in the market, its price goes down. To the point where sometimes you have to throw it away. Nobody’s buying it. Too much for the market. That’s the way it is with most of our minds. We think, think, think, think, think. And with every thought, the value of the thoughts go down. What you want to do is have a think about one thing. Think about the breath. How is your breath right now? How does it feel? How do you relate to the breath? Think about the breath bathing your whole body. You’re in the middle of the breath. It’s on all sides. It’s in front of you, it’s behind you, it’s to the left, to the right, above and below. As you breathe in, as you breathe out, the whole body is breathing in. The whole body is breathing out. Every nerve in your nervous system is involved. And that’s it. Just stay right there and protect that. If you think of the breath energy as being comfortable throughout the body, there is a danger that you will go with a sense of comfort and forget the fact that you’re trying to stay concentrated on the breath. So you have to keep reminding yourself, the whole body breathing, whole body breathing. If you forget and start wallowing in the pleasure, then that lack of mindfulness provides an opening for thoughts to come back in again. So try to fill your nervous system with the thought of breathing, so no gaps, no little openings where something else can come in. This way you keep your mind one. When it’s one, it’s the sort of thing that you would be happy to give as a present to somebody else. You’re going to give your mind to the princess for the sour. Make sure it’s the kind of mind that you’d be happy to offer in front of everybody. And if your mind is just lots of bits of string and fur and other things that a pack rat would pick up, it’s not the kind of thing you’d want to give to anybody. You certainly don’t want to give it in public. So make your mind one and then keep it that way, polish it. Any little bit of dust that comes to settle on it, you polish it away. So you make your mind bright and shining. The kind of thing that you would be happy to give, you would be proud to give as a gift. So you’re giving this gift of stillness, you’re giving this gift of singleness. And John Lee tells a story when he was in Bangkok one time, a Somdet, a very high-ranking monk, who had a very low opinion of the forest tradition, happened to be sick. So he went to his room, bowed down, sat off in a corner. And started meditating. And he was basically dedicating the current of his mind to the old sick monk. And the monk could feel it, that John Lee’s mind was that strong. So he said, “What are you doing?” And John Lee says, “I’m making a gift of stillness.” And the old monk said, “Well, whatever it is, keep on doing it. It feels good.” So our minds may not be as strong as John Lee’s, but we can make them good. We can polish them, make them bright, make them one. So at the very least we have something of value inside. And then at the end of the hour we have something of value that we can give. The kind of gift that we can give with pride.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2023/230122_A_Gift_of_Stillness.mp3>