Blessings

August 24, 2023

We sometimes refer to the Buddha as the Blessed One. And the question comes up, “Who blessed him?” And the answer is, “He blessed himself.” Not only that, he taught other people how to bless themselves. In the discourse we chatted just now, he gave a series of blessings. They all come down to things you can do to bless yourself. They start with not associating with fools, associating with wise people, having respect for things and people worthy of respect. That’s a good principle for using in your meditation. We all have different voices in our minds. And some of them are wise voices and some of them are foolish. And when we meditate, we train ourselves to give more power to the wise voices, pay less attention to the fools. And we do that by having respect for something worthy of respect, which is our desire for true happiness. The happiness that doesn’t disappoint. The happiness that doesn’t change. The happiness that causes no harm to anyone. And the Buddha himself respected that desire for that kind of happiness, which is why he left home, went into the forest, went into the wilderness, and tried every path he could think of to lead to that happiness. And he finally found the path. He found it by beginning with right concentration. Getting the mind still, getting it focused on one thing. And you begin by talking to yourself about what would be a good topic to focus on. He recommended the breath. That was the topic he was focused on on the night of his awakening. And when he taught meditation, this was the topic he taught more than any other topic. Because the breath is with you all the time. Coming in, going out. You don’t have to worry about it. You don’t have to borrow it from anyone. You don’t have to buy it from anyone. It’s yours. It’s so much yours that no one else can know how it feels. You’re the only one that can know. And so he recommends in the beginning, talk to yourself about what kind of breathing feels good. You can try long breathing for a while. Short breathing. You can do variations on that. You can do heavy breathing, light breathing, fast, slow, deep, shallow. Experiment for a while to see what kind of breathing feels good for the body right now. When you think of the breath, it’s not just the air coming in and out through the nose. It’s the flow of energy, the prana, going through the whole body. So as you breathe in, think of the whole body. Breathing in, breathe out, think of the whole body breathing out. Focus your attention on whatever spot in the body the breath is most obvious. And pay particular attention to how the breathing feels in that spot. Choose a spot that’s very sensitive, that tells you this kind of breathing feels good, that kind of breathing doesn’t feel so good. Those kinds of voices are the wise voices in your mind right now. The ones that get you interested in the breath. Because if you simply force the mind to stay here without getting interested, it’s not going to stay. And the first question in getting interested is what kind of breathing feels good. Energizing when you need more energy. Relaxing when you’re tense. Think of the breath soothing you as it comes in, as it goes out. And as for any other thoughts that might come through the mind, just let them go. Think of your awareness being like a big window right now. And the breeze can come in, the breeze can go out. But you’ve got a screen on the window and the screen doesn’t move. And it doesn’t catch anything. If a thought comes in right now that’s not related to the breath, you don’t have to catch it. Don’t pay any attention to it. If you do find yourself wandering away from the breath, just drop whatever that thought is. You don’t have to finish the thought, just leave it dangling. Come back to how the breathing feels right here, right now. When you can stay with the breath, try to be extra sensitive to what feels especially good as you breathe in, as you breathe out. And then how you can let that sense of good feeling spread through the different parts of the body. There may be tension here, pains there. Think of the breath working around those things, and if possible dissolving them away. You’re trying to nourish the whole body with the breath, all the way through all the nerves, all the way through all the blood vessels, all the muscles, every part of the body. You can have a chance to participate in the breathing. The mind can settle down. Like this. You realize you have your own space. Try to protect it. Try to be mindful and alert and ardent in what you’re doing. Mindfulness means keeping something in mind. In this case you’re keeping the breath in mind. Alert means knowing what you’re doing. Breathing in long, you’re breathing in short, deep, shallow, you know. And you know the results of what you’re doing as well. As you read the results, you decide that they’re good or not so good. If they’re good, you maintain them. If they’re not so good, you can change. This is the quality called ardency. You’re trying to do this well. Give it your full attention. Tell yourself you have no other responsibilities right now. It’s just you sitting here with your breath. When the Buddha describes mindfulness practice, he talks about these three qualities and he also says that you put aside greed and distress with reference to the world. Any thoughts of the world outside, people outside, places outside. You don’t have to think about them right now. You’re not responsible for them right now. Your only responsibility is to look after the state of your own mind. Try to maintain the voices in the mind. Support the voices in the mind that tell you to stay here and point you to different ways of getting interested in the breath. And you’re doing this for the sake of your own true happiness, which is worthy of respect. There’ll be other voices that tell you that you have other responsibilities. You have to worry about this, worry about that. The Buddha calls those voices hindrances. They’re getting in the way of your true happiness. And although you may have responsibilities outside in the world, you don’t have to think about them right now. Otherwise you become like those dockworkers. They used to have in the docks before shipping containers came into Asia. People would carry huge loads on their backs up and down the planks of the ships. They’re spending so much time carrying the loads that they became permanently bent over. Even when they were going home they would walk bent over. That’s the nature of a mind that can’t put down its responsibilities, can’t put down its cares and worries. You get bent. You can’t stand up straight. So right now think of all the burdens you’ve had falling off your shoulders, falling off your back. You can stand up straight, sit up straight. And for the time being you’re going to be free. This is how you bless yourself. Visualize voices inside, associate with them. As for other voices, regard them as fools. You don’t have to hang out with fools. And show some respect for what really is worthy of respect, your desire for true, harmless happiness. The Buddha said that we can find this through our own efforts. He shows us the way. So have some respect for your own abilities as well. This is something you can do, even if the mind doesn’t settle down right away. If you stick with it, you find that you get better and better at it. This is a skill that you can develop. Keeping those three qualities in mind. Mindfulness, alertness, ardency. So the mind can gather into one. Then you find that what you need for the sake of true happiness, what you need to bless yourself, is here in potential form inside. You’re simply learning how to make the most of your potentials. So there are a lot of possibilities inside. And John Lee, my teacher’s teacher, once said, “The sad thing about human beings is we have so many good potentials inside and we don’t develop them.” But here you have nothing else to keep you from getting in touch with what those potentials are and seeing what you can make out of them. So try your best.

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