

For Your Own Welfare & Happiness

March 1, 2015

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch the breath coming in; watch it going out.

If you want to think a word to go together with the breath, you can think *Buddho*. “*Buddho*” means awake, it’s the title of the Buddha. He woke up from his sleep of ignorance in which he was causing suffering for himself and suffering for others. He saw that he didn’t have to do that anymore. That’s the kind of quality we want to develop in our minds.

We’ve learned about the goodness of the Buddha’s teachings from people we respect, people we love. Many of them have passed on now, but we still want to hold on to the goodness of those teachings. We learned from those people what was good—and what was good about it was that it doesn’t depend on their being around or not being around. The goodness is still there in the world if you take advantage of it, if you practice it.

The same when we see other people around us practicing things that are not skillful: Our goodness shouldn’t have to depend on them. We want to have a goodness inside that’s really solid and independent.

This is why we have to meditate, because we want to find a well-being inside that doesn’t depend on things outside. If all the well-being in your mind depends on having enough food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, what happens when those things aren’t enough? You want to have something else inside to depend on.

This is why we meditate: to get this sense of well-being inside. You want to be at ease with the breath, solidly with the breath, so that when the breath comes in, it feels good and nourishing; when it goes out it feels refreshing. In this way, the mind begins to gain a sense of the goodness inside that doesn’t have to depend on people outside at all. This allows you to stick with the other principles of the teaching as well, because you have this strength that comes from within.

So when other people are good to you, you’re good back. When people are *not* good to you, you can still be good back to them. This is why we spread goodwill to all beings without exception. We want to make sure that when we engage with all beings, then regardless of whether we like them or not, whether they’re good people or not good people, we want our goodness to be solid. That’s the one thing we have some control over, the one thing for which we’re really responsible.

As for the people who have been good to us who have passed on, we want to dedicate our goodness to them. It’s a sign of our remembering them and being true

to their memory by maintaining that goodness as well.

So the goodness is what gives meaning to life. It's what makes human life better than the life of animals, because we know what's right and what's wrong and we can act on that knowledge. That way, we can give rise to a happiness for ourselves that's blameless, a happiness that's solid, and encourage others in the same direction. But whether they follow our example or not is something that's really up to them. You want to make sure that *you* set a good example. That's the best you can do for other people, and at the same time you maintain this goodness for your own purposes.

After all, as the Buddha said, this is for our own welfare and happiness. You observe the precepts for your own welfare and happiness. You're generous and give gifts for your own welfare and happiness. You try to encourage other people do that for their welfare and happiness. But it has to start with you.

And where does it start in you? It starts here in the mind. Some people say, "I have to be generous first and then I can practice the precepts and *then* I can do meditation." But the three activities need one another to be really strong. So you want to be generous and practice the precepts and meditate at the same time. That way, all three of these activities that give rise to happiness can be really strong.

The happiness you give rise to will be a happiness that's complete. It won't be missing this or missing that, because it falls in line with the heart of the Buddha's teachings, which we'll be commemorating in a few days on Magha Puja. He said to abandon all forms of evil, to develop skillfulness to the full extent, and then to cleanse the mind.

So we abandon behavior that's against the precepts. We develop skillfulness in being generous: not only with things but also with our time, with our energy, with our knowledge, with our forgiveness. And then we cleanse the mind with the meditation.

This way, the heart of the Buddha's teachings is going to be a complete heart. It won't be missing this ventricle or this valve. It's a heart that can pump life and goodness into the rest of your life.