

## *Noble Happiness*

*October 7, 2006*

We start the evening meditation with chants of goodwill because that's the underlying motive for our practice: the desire for happiness, the desire for *true* happiness, both for ourselves and for others. We're looking for a happiness where our true happiness and the happiness of other people is in concert, in harmony. All too often out in the world, one person's happiness means someone else's misery.

When the Buddha taught causality, he started with the issue of feeding. We feed off one another, physically and emotionally, and it can be a real burden. So what we're looking for is a happiness that doesn't need to feed. That means we have to look within us, because the nature of the body is that it's got to feed. As for the mind, though, there's a question: Does it have to feed or can it be independent? So we look inside to see.

We start out with something really basic. Focus on the breath. Notice when the breath is coming in; notice when it's coming out. Think about the breath. Keep the breath in mind. That's mindfulness. And then be alert to how the breath feels. Notice when it's comfortable, notice when it's not. When it's not comfortable, you can change it.

This is a very immediate and visceral way of showing goodwill for yourself, finding that you can develop a sense of ease in the body simply by the way you breathe. It doesn't cost any money and it doesn't take anything away from anyone else. The body is breathing anyhow, so watch it. Learn to be a connoisseur of your breathing. When you can develop a sense of well-being inside just by the way you breathe, it takes a lot of weight off of your other relationships.

When you're feeding on this person or that thing for your happiness, and that's all you've got, you're going to get pretty desperate about it. You'll clutch at these things, and you don't want them to change. Or if they're going to change, you want them to change in a way that you decide they should change. But they often don't. Yet when you have an alternative source of happiness, a sense of well-being, just feeling comfortable in your own skin by the way you breathe, then as you relate to other things, it's with a lot less desperation, a lot less clinging. That takes a big burden off of other people right there.

Sometimes, as meditators, we're accused of being selfish, looking out only for our own good. But the fact that you can find a source for happiness inside means

that you're going to be a lot less burdensome to other people. That's a gift right there.

The Buddha's basic insight into happiness was that when happiness is true, then working for your own happiness is also working for the happiness of others; working for their true happiness is working for yours. The image he gives is of two acrobats, one standing on the shoulders of the other. Each of them has to look out after his or her own sense of balance. As you maintain your balance, you help other people. You don't throw them off balance.

So as you sit here meditating, keep in mind that this is a gift to yourself and a gift to other people. You're exploring the realm of happiness that doesn't have any disadvantages. Ajaan Mun used to say that the happiness that doesn't have any disadvantages, that's true happiness: the happiness that doesn't impose anything on anyone else, doesn't harm anybody else. As you explore this happiness and learn to depend on it more and more, it's an act of compassion. It's natural wisdom, because it's a kind of happiness that lasts. If your happiness depends on the misery of other people, they're going to try to put an end to it. Or if it depends on anything physical or material, anything social, those things all have to end, too. But a happiness that comes from within doesn't have to end. And as the Buddha says, searching for that kind of happiness is an act of wisdom.

As you begin to notice how your thoughts, words, and deeds affect yourself and affect other people, and you make up your mind to act only on the things that really do cause happiness and to try to avoid anything you notice that causes harm: That, he says, is how you develop purity in your thoughts, your words, and your deeds.

So all the qualities of the Buddha—wisdom, compassion and purity—come from here. They come from his quest for happiness, his quest for true happiness. And that, as the Buddha said, is a noble search.

For most of us, the quest for happiness is anything but noble. Grabbing at something; grabbing at this; grabbing at that; snatching it away from other people: That's the way most people search for happiness. It's just like animals. But as the Buddha noticed, if you gain a sense of happiness that comes from within that doesn't take anything away from anyone else, that changes the whole equation. The search for that happiness develops all the good and noble qualities you want in the mind.

This is why he called that the path to that happiness a noble path, because the happiness itself is noble, the search for that happiness is a noble search. It's a search that gives dignity to your life, and gives it meaning. So this is why meditation is a combination of two other practices: the practice of generosity and

the practice of virtue. Because the practice of meditation is both virtuous and generous.

So meditate with confidence. As you notice the mind slipping off the breath and you bring it back, have a sense that what you're doing is something very important, something very noble. It may not seem like much right now, but as you develop your skills in mindfulness, alertness, concentration, and discernment, you find that they lead to a really special kind of happiness.

This is why we bow down to the Buddha, because he teaches us of this potential. He teaches us to respect within ourselves things that are really are worthy of respect. And as we develop them, we can see that they genuinely are noble.

So keep these thoughts in mind as you practice.