

Peace on Earth

December 24, 2009

Peace on earth has to begin right here, right where the body and the mind meet at the breath. Try to develop a sense of harmony here. As you're focusing on the breath, don't push it too much but don't wander away. Give it your undivided attention and see how it responds. If it responds well, stick with it. If not, you can change: Either change the breath or change the way you focus. The important thing is having a sense of harmony, because that's an essential part of peace, and you learn about harmony by experimenting inside. When you learn the quality of mind that's attentive, sensitive, observant, unwavering, and can apply that inside, it's a lot easier to apply it outside as well.

We would like to think that the world could be at peace, but it's not a task the Buddha set for us. Each of us has our own ideas about what would be a good way to live in the world, and there's no way you can force other beings to live in line with your ideas. The more you try to force them, the less peaceful things become. But you can set an example inside, an example with your own thoughts, your own words, your own deeds. At the very least, the world of your becoming will have a peaceful center. That's your main responsibility.

As Ajaan Suwat used to say, each of us has only one person. What he meant is that each of us has only one person we're really responsible for. You can't be responsible for the deeds of other people but you *can* be responsible for your own. All too often, though, we neglect our own true responsibility and go around trying to straighten out everybody else. This is one of the reasons why the world is in such turmoil. Everybody is straightening out everybody else and not looking at themselves.

So you want to look inside to see what you can straighten out here. And you find that the breath can be very useful this way. Ajaan Lee talks about the breath as the main element or property of the body that brings the other elements or properties into balance, into harmony. So notice how you conceive the breath. When you think of the breath coming in, what's the mental picture you have? Does the mental picture force the breath in a way that makes it impossible for harmony to develop, for peace to develop, for balance to develop?

Try to keep in mind the fact that your primary sensation of having a body is breath, so the breath should be your first perception of things. All too often, we think of the solid part of the body as breathing the breath in and breathing the breath out, so we focus on the solid parts as our primary experience of the body, as

our primary agents in how to get the breath in, how to get the breath out. We sometimes take the tense and tight parts, and try to breathe with them, which of course only makes things worse. Remind yourself: The breath can penetrate everywhere. The breath is primary. It comes before your other sensations. Just hold that thought in mind. And if you have any patterns of tightness or tension anywhere in the body, think of the breath penetrating through them, totally, instantly, with no obstacles, nothing—because after all, the breath is there beforehand. The tension comes afterwards. If you reverse the priorities, reverse your perceptions like this, the breath has more range. It can do more in the body. You're not placing limitations on it.

So allow it to just dissolve any unskillful perceptions you may be holding. Each time you breathe in, think of the body as a clean slate. The breath can go everywhere, anywhere, all at once. It can go in strange directions and do all kinds of things, whatever is needed to keep the body feeling buoyant.

An important point to notice here when you breathe out is that you not breathe out too long. The more you breathe out long, the tighter things become in the body. So allow the breath to go out just right, then breathe in again, breathe out again, breathe in again, and allow the breath to dissolve anything that seems uncomfortable, that seems blocked.

After you've played with the breath like this for a while, ask yourself what feels right, what feels balanced in the body, in terms of the breath. Are things too light? Too heavy? Too warm? Too cold? See if you can use the breath to bring them into balance.

In doing this, you create a sense of ease in body and mind, a sense of harmony, so that the peace that you feel inside is palpable. It's not just an idea. It's a visceral sense of well-being. In Thai they have the compound, *santi-sukh*, which means peace and happiness, peace and ease. The two go together. When the mind is at peace, there's a sense of well-being. When you can keep this well-being going, then you're acting from a sense of well-being. The things you say, the things you do as you're dealing with the world outside come from a better place, from a stronger place.

So you're not acting out of hunger, you're not acting out of a sense of feeling weak or threatened. When you have a sense of peace inside, it's easy to feel goodwill for all beings and not want to harm anybody. You ask yourself, "Why would I want to harm anyone? It'd destroy the sense of well-being already there." The reason people harm others is because they lack a sense of well-being, or their sense of well-being seems threatened. They'll do just about anything to attain their idea of a secure sense of well-being, but then they just keep chasing that idea and

never reaching it, because the things they do are destructive. Yet if you're coming from a genuine sense of inner well-being, you wouldn't want to harm it. If your well-being comes from inside, you realize after a while there's no way that other people can threaten it. The only threat comes from your own lack of mindfulness, your own lack of attention. This helps keep your priorities straight.

So peace begins here. Harmony begins here. You're not out to conquer the world. You're here to conquer yourself, to overcome any lack of mindfulness, lack of alertness, lack of discernment or concentration that can have a bad effect on your well-being.

There's a passage in the Canon saying that it's hard for person without merit to do meritorious things. To translate that into more colloquial English, it's hard for person without a sense of well-being to do things that would lead to genuine well-being. That makes you wonder: How then are you going to get started on that? Well, you start right here. Be very attentive to how the breath feels in the body. Bring a friendly interest to the breath. Try to remove whatever limitations you have on the concept of breath, so that it can help bring things into balance.

Then, when you're coming from a sense of inner well-being, it's a lot easier to do the right thing, say the right thing, whatever it is helpful, whatever is harmless, because you've found a source of happiness that's harmless as well, so there's no need to do hurtful things or say hurtful things or think hurtful things. All you have to do is to maintain the sense of well-being and allow it to grow from within.

So if you're looking for peace, this is the way you look. You don't wait for other people to get peaceful or for other people to be good, because you'll wait to your dying day and nothing will happen. You want to start right now. Goodness in the world, peace in the world, harmony in the world, all have to start out right here, right now, with you. And you'll find that you're experiencing it directly right here. The good thing about this peace is that it spreads around. It's one of the few forms of happiness where everyone gets a share. In other words, the good things you do for other people, based on your sense of well-being, don't diminish your well-being. They actually strengthen it.

So pay careful attention right here, because this is where everything starts.