

Endurance Training

August 12, 2013

It's always good to start with thoughts of goodwill. It cleans out the mind. There may be issues that come from the day. This person said this; that person did that. You did this or you did that—things you don't like to think about. If you don't do a little cleaning out beforehand, it's going to be hard for the mind to settle down. It's like trying to lie down on a bed where broken things are lying all over the bed, so you clean them off.

May all beings be happy—regardless. But that doesn't mean, "May they all be happy just the way they are," because that would go against the principle of action, that people find happiness based on their actions. So you're basically wishing, "May all people act skillfully; may they understand the causes of true happiness and act on those causes." That's something you can wish for anybody, regardless of how bad they've been, how disruptive, how horrible.

Keep those thoughts in mind and sweep them around the world, because there's enough ill will out there already. You don't have to add any more. At the same time, you want the mind to settle down, be at peace, and find some ease and well-being in the present moment. You want to lift it above the normal everyday concerns that make it small.

We're trying to enlarge the mind here so that your awareness can fill the body. But you find, as your awareness fills the body, that it's running into things that are uncomfortable. At first, you want to make sure you've got as many outside issues taken care of as possible so that they don't pull you away and you don't trip over them as you settle down. Then bring that goodwill inside and try to breathe in a way that feels good. Breathe in a way that gives the mind strength. Develop good qualities in the mind.

When we meditate, we're feeding the mind, but at the same time, we're exercising it. Now, if the mind just feeds, feeds, feeds, that's the image for clinging. You feed off something but you don't get any genuine nourishment out of it. But as we meditate, we're feeding and exercising the mind at the same time, as if we were putting the mind on a good exercise regimen.

If it's getting healthy exercise, getting healthy food, the mind will grow strong. If it's just feeding off sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, then—as we see when we go through the day—there are good ones and there are bad ones. Even as we spend so much time running after the pleasant sensations and succeed in getting as many as we can, we still find that there's something wrong with the

mind if it's running around after those things. It lacks strength. It lacks the qualities it needs in order to deal with difficulties.

This is why people are really addicted to pleasure and have so much trouble with pain. The least little discomfort arises in body or in mind, and they go for the quick fix. This is another one of the advantages of having an expansive mind state. It helps see you through a lot of the difficulties. It gives you a good foundation for patience and endurance.

The words *patience* and *endurance* don't have much glamour because we tend to think of them as meaning having to put up with something unpleasant and gritting your teeth. But genuine patience comes from a sense of well-being that you can create inside so that when things are difficult outside, you're not pushed around by them. You've got something better inside. So the Buddha has you create this sense of well-being and also learn how to think skillfully about unpleasant things. Unpleasant sensations, unpleasant words: Those are the two things where he recommends patience the most.

In terms of unpleasant sensations, you have to reflect on the fact you've got this physical body. The body is made so that it can pick up both pleasant sensations and painful sensations. Ajaan Suwat once said that if you don't believe the body's ready to be pained at any time, just take an iron stake and stick it in the body anywhere at all. It's going to be painful. As the Buddha said, you've got this physical body, and it's the kind of body to which all kinds of painful things can happen. People can hit you; people can throw things at you. If you didn't have this body, no one would know where to throw things at you. But here you are: You've got this physical body, and it's a target not only for people's behavior, but also for all the germs that can come in, all the diseases that can come with the body. So you can't take it personally. This is what everybody's body is like as long as you're in the human realm.

So what are you going to do? You've got to develop the qualities of the mind that enable you to put up with the pain and not feel pained by it. In other words, find something that's deep and solid in the mind—so deep that the pain can't reach there, so solid that it's not moved by pain—until you can get to the part where, as Ajaan Lee once said, the words “pleasure” and “pain” are things that you speak in jest. They're not that serious for you anymore. The only way you'll get there is, on the one hand, to develop a really deep sense of well-being inside the mind and, on the other, to learn how to look at the body in impersonal terms so that when a pain arises, you're not developing a narrative around it—in particular, not any narratives that make the pain worse.

The same goes with unpleasant words from other people. First, the Buddha says, remind yourself that on the human level all kinds of speech are spoken. There are kind words and unkind words; words that are meant well and words that are not meant well; true, false; timely, untimely. So when you're the victim of unfair, unkind, untimely speech, it's not that far out of the ordinary. There's always that possibility here, and you're running into it right now.

That's one way of depersonalizing it. The other way, as he says, is to tell yourself, "An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear." If you can leave it just at that, you're free from it. The problem is that an unpleasant sound makes contact at the ear, and you think about, "Well, who said that unpleasant sound? Why are they saying that? Why do they hate me? Why do they dislike me?"—whatever. You're just stabbing yourself again and again and again. So try to depersonalize it. It's just that: an unpleasant sound making contact at the ear. It comes and it goes. That's it. Don't let it reverberate in your head or in your heart. Don't make it into a gong that just keeps ringing long after it's been struck.

Here again is a good time to spread goodwill. When a person says nasty things or does harmful or hurtful things, the Buddha says to spread goodwill. Start with that person. Later on in the tradition, they would recommend starting with yourself, but sometimes that's not quick enough. You've got to start with that person: May that person be happy. In other words, may that person learn how to act skillfully. They may not be acting skillfully now, and their skillful behavior may come too late for you. But may they someday become skillful in their thoughts, words, and deeds.

The Buddha compares this to having a mind as expansive as the earth, as expansive and as unaffected by anything as space. Again, it's an image of the enlarged mind that's not constantly feeding on "he did that," and "then he did that," and "she did this," and then "I didn't at all"—or whatever. Just let that stuff dissolve away. Through the well-being of your concentration and through your discernment in learning how to depersonalize things, chop up the stories into little bits. When those little bits start connecting, that's when they turn into trouble.

As you develop these skills, you're developing mindfulness and alertness, the strengths you need so that you don't have to keep feeding on the desire: "I want someone to be nice; I want someone to speak kindly to me, to respect me," or whatever the issue is. It's when you chop up those little bits that the mind is free to be large. And it's able to endure things and be patient, not because it's trying so hard, but because it's learned to be larger than whatever the issues are.