

## *Inner Wealth*

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Years back, Stephen Colbert made a comment about Buddhism. He said, “You wrap yourself up in a cloth, you go sit under a tree, and you breathe?” Yep. That’s what we’re doing. We’re not under a tree right now, but we are sitting here breathing, focusing on the breath, realizing that the breath has a huge role in contributing to our well-being. Of course, if we didn’t breathe, we’d be dead. But more than that, the way you breathe can have an effect on the health of the body and the health of the mind.

So pay careful attention to how you’re breathing. Take a couple of good long and deep in-and-out breaths, and notice where you feel the process of breathing in the body, that sense of energy flow. That’s what you’re actually focusing on when you focus on the breath—not so much the air coming in and out of the lungs, but the flow of energy in the body. And that exists on many levels. You start with the energy that allows the air to come in and go out, but as you get more and more sensitive to how it feels just being here in your own body, fully inhabiting your own body, you begin to realize that there are other subtle energies that go throughout the body, all the way down to the tips of the fingers, the tips of the toes. But start with the ones that are most obvious.

Start wherever you feel the breathing. Wherever it seems most prominent, focus your attention there. Try to stay there, both so that you can observe the breath carefully and so that you can begin to observe the mind carefully, while at the same time giving the mind a place to settle down. The mind needs a place to settle because that’s where the mind gains its sense of well-being: in its ability to stay in one place for a while. It’s like moving into a house. If you had to unpack your baggage and then pack it up again every day, moving out of the house and then coming back in again, there’d be no real ease in living in the house. But you move in, unpack your baggage, and stay. If for any reason you have to go out for a while, you don’t have to repack your bags. When you come back, everything is in its place. You can relax.

The mind needs a place to stay like that for its basic well-being. Otherwise, it’s going around looking for things outside all the time to compensate for the fact that its home is not a good place to be. So move back in. Make this house in the body a home by the way you breathe. You can try long breathing, short breathing, fast, slow, heavy, light. See what kind of breathing feels best for the body right

now, because the breath is one of the functions of the body that can be both automatic and under your control. Learn how to use that control to a good purpose so that the mind can have a sense of being well-fed inside. After all, the mind has its food just like the body has its food. The mind has its wealth just as the body has its wealth. Ultimately the food and the wealth of the body are much less important than the food and the wealth of the mind. So start feeding the mind well with a sense of well-being, but also with your intention to do something good.

You're training the mind here to be more alert, more mindful, to put its heart into doing something good and doing it well. "Mindful" means able to keep something in mind. It's not just simply a matter of noticing what's arising and passing away, without reacting, just accepting everything that comes. That's equanimity. That's something else. Mindfulness is remembering that the mind needs to be trained and remembering what you've learned about how to do it, so that when something comes up in the mind, you learn how to recognize that quality of mind as skillful or unskillful, helpful or unhelpful in training the mind, and then you remember what to do with the skillful qualities, what to do with the unskillful qualities.

For the time being, there's one simple lesson to remember, and that's: Stay with the breath. If the mind wanders off, just drop that thought and come right back. It wanders off again, drop the thought, come back again. Don't get discouraged. Each time you come back, don't come down hard on yourself for having wandered off. Instead, reward yourself for the fact that you've come back, by breathing in a way that feels really good. Think of parts of the body that aren't getting much nourishment from the breath and think of the breath going right there. And, of course, if you can do one breath like that, you can do two and then three and four.

See if you can find a way of breathing that feels really good for the parts of the body that are tired, that have been tense. You'll find that this ability to stay with the body in the present, with a sense of well-being in the body, can be really nourishing. When the breath feels good, think of that comfortable sensation permeating throughout the body. Think of the whole body breathing, all the nerves in the body breathing, all the blood vessels, all the muscles, all the parts breathing together. In this way, you create a good home right here, and then you can fill your home with wealth.

Someone once came to see the Buddha and commented on a millionaire who lived in the town, exclaiming over his treasures—gold, silver, all kinds of things. The Buddha said, yes, there is that kind of wealth, but there's another kind of

wealth that nothing outside can touch. He called it noble wealth, and that's the wealth that's good for the mind. That's the wealth that really provides good food for the mind, and there's no criticism of people who amass this kind of wealth at all. With outside wealth, some people are greedy, some people cheat, but then what do they get? They get lots of material things but then they have to let them go. With inside wealth, that you don't gain it by cheating—in fact, you *can't* gain it by cheating. It comes from the goodness you develop inside, and nothing can take it away. Fire can't burn it. Water can't wash it away. Thieves can't take it. And it's much better than outside wealth in providing a secure sense of real well-being for the mind.

There are seven qualities in all that count as inner wealth. The first is conviction. Technically, it's conviction in the Buddha's awakening, but what it means for us is the fact that human beings can, through their own efforts, find happiness. Their efforts really do make a difference. We do have an impact through our actions on the happiness or the lack of happiness we experience. This thought is empowering because it encourages you to trust in the fact that, yes, your actions do make a difference and so you're more and more inclined to put an effort into doing them well. That's wealth right there.

And then there are three other qualities that go immediately together with that: a sense of shame, a sense of compunction, and virtue. The shame here is not the unhealthy shame where you feel bad about yourself, which is the opposite of pride. This is the shame that's the opposite of shamelessness. In other words, you think of doing something unskillful and you'd be ashamed. You realize that it's beneath you. You think of how the people you respect would look at you if you did something like that. That's a form of wealth because it can prevent you from doing all kinds of things that you're later going to regret.

Years back, I heard a radio broadcast where an old veteran of the Vietnam War was talking about a young girl he had killed years back during the war. He said every day the picture of that girl's face comes into his mind. He can hardly sleep at night. He said that if he had a million dollars, he'd go back and undo that part of his past. Well, even a million dollars can't erase things you've done in the past. So develop a proper sense of shame and put it together with a sense of compunction—in other words, the sense that if you realize that something's going to lead to unskillful results, you say, "I don't want those results"—which is the opposite of apathy. You care about the results of your actions. So shame together with care and compunction are worth more than a million dollars or any amount of money, because, working together they prevent you from doing things you'll later regret.

They go together with virtue: the promises you make to yourself not to harm others. The Buddha lists five virtues: not killing, not stealing, not having illicit sex, not lying, not taking intoxicants. Of those five, he gives the most importance to not lying, because a lie can do a lot more damage for a much longer time even than killing. You kill somebody and that's just the end of one life, but if you give them wrong information, sometimes that can affect them for many lifetimes.

So you're very careful not to harm anyone, and then you can look at your own actions, realizing that you've caused no harm. That creates a huge sense of well-being in the mind. You've lived in the world and you haven't just been taking. You've actually been giving, which is another one of the seven qualities of inner wealth: the ability to give, the desire to give. Generosity is not simply a matter of giving when you have to. It's giving when you want to, where you feel inspired, where you feel that someone else would make good use of what you have. You have more than enough to share.

This ability to see that you have more than enough to share is, in and of itself, a form of wealth. So many people in the world have piles and piles of wealth, yet they don't have a sense of enough, and that attitude of the mind—that *not enough, not enough*: That's poverty in the mind. Whereas if you realize you're strong enough and your sense of well-being inside is steady enough to be perfectly fine without with all kinds of things and so you're happy to share what you have, that creates a much more spacious mind. At the same time, it creates a sense of commonality, because if you give something to somebody else, it actually erases a barrier between you and the other person. It's as if that other person was now a member of your family. When you demand payment for something, that creates a barrier.

This is reflected in Thailand when the monks live in what we call an economy of gifts. We depend on the gifts of others, and the monks will often talk to their supporters as if they were members of the family. And it's not just that the monks are on the taking side. When you regard your donors as members of the family, you can't help but feel sympathy for them. You want to make sure that you're not abusing their generosity. There are a lot of rules around this for the monks, but it's more that just rules. There's an attitude you should foster. You're happy to receive other people's generosity. You appreciate the effort they put into it, so you don't want to abuse it, even if the generosity you're receiving is not anything you particularly like. You realize that it comes out of the goodness of someone's heart, so that places a burden on you.

When I was in Thailand and I was on my alms round, there was one very poor family, just a young couple. They had just gotten married. They lived in a little

shack that was just big enough for the two of them to lie down in, with a little kitchen out behind. But almost every day, they would have food for my bowl. I'd go back to the monastery after receiving their food and remind myself, "I've been the recipient of a poor person's generosity. I've really got to practice hard today."

So as I said, generosity erases barriers and creates a good society. A society in which people are simply thinking in terms of money and what they can get is a society that breaks down, because it's a society filled with walls that divide us from one another. Generosity is what erases those walls. It makes society a good place to live. You might say that generosity is the price we pay for the advantages of living with humanity in a humane way. But it's a price that's a pleasure to pay.

The two remaining forms of wealth are learning, learning of the Dhamma—in other words, figuring out, learning what the Buddha had to say, the teachings that help us look for the causes of suffering inside and also look for the cessation of suffering inside through qualities we can develop inside—and then discernment, learning how to apply those teachings so that we get those benefits.

When we have all these forms of wealth inside, that's when the mind is prosperous. And that's the kind of prosperity that really means something. The prosperity in the world comes and goes. It goes up and down with the economy. And as I said, there's nothing particularly honorable about being wealthy in external terms. But there is honor in internal wealth, noble wealth. That sense of honor in and of itself is food for the mind: the sense of well-being that makes it easier for the mind to settle down when you sit down here and meditate. You can reflect back on the day, you can reflect on the way your actions have influenced the people around you, affected the people around you, and it's easy to spread goodwill to everybody because there's no one you've harmed. From that sense of goodwill, then you can focus on developing the qualities of the mind where you're going to try to find a happiness that doesn't harm anybody—yourself or anyone else.

So these are the forms of wealth that you want to include in creating the sense of belonging right here right now, feeling at home right here right now—because you've created a really spacious sense of belonging inside.