

## *A Heart & Mind of Goodwill*

*July 23, 2019*

Close your eyes and focus your attention on the breath. It's good to start with a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths to make very clear the sensation of breathing in the body, because the breathing in the body is what we'll focusing on—not so much the air coming in and out of the nose, but the energy flow in the body that allows the air to come in and out. Notice where you sense it. Then notice if it's comfortable. We're trying to bring the mind to the present moment, so we have to make the present moment a pleasant place to be. Ask yourself what kind of breathing would feel good for you right now. You want it to be clear enough so you can keep your attention focused on it. Sometimes heavy breathing feels good, it's energizing. Other times you want something lighter, longer, shorter, faster, slower, deeper, more shallow. Try to find what feels good right now and then keep your attention focused continuously.

One of the ways of making the breath more comfortable is to make your attention steady and continuous. If there are gaps in your attention, your breath goes back to its old ways in the gaps, which may or may not be okay for the breath and the body, but it's certainly not good for the mind, these gaps. They're a direct experience of ignorance. You're suddenly off someplace else, not paying attention to what you're doing. The mind just wanders around. But here we're trying to bring the mind under control.

The world “mind,” in Pali, *citta*, can be translated into English both as “mind” and as “heart.” So we're trying to bring our heart into this as well—in other words, both wanting to do it and having our reasons. The reasons are because we want happiness, a happiness that doesn't harm anybody. That's a wise combination of your heart and your mind. Because you realize that if your happiness depends on the suffering of others, they're not going to stand for it.

It's interesting that the Buddha makes this point sometimes talking to little children and sometimes talking to kings, because both little children and kings tend to want to get things their way without thinking too much about how it's going to affect other people. In other words, both of them have a part of the heart where the mind has no influence, or at least it's not part of the discussion. It's simply wanting, wanting, wanting what you want.

One of the times the Buddha made this point was when some boys were tormenting a crab. He asks them, “Do you like pleasure and do you dislike pain?” They say, “Yes.” “Then why are you inflicting pain on others?” Stop and think about it. Others like pleasure and they fear pain too. So when you think about that, you shouldn't harm anybody. We tend to think if we love ourselves

and want our own happiness, that means we're set on a collision course with other people because they often want their happiness out of the same things that we want. But he says that if you're really wise about your desire for happiness, realizing that other people who are struggling to find their happiness, too, you should have goodwill for them just as you have goodwill for yourself.

That means at the very least not harming them or getting anybody else to harm them. Because if you did that, getting someone else to do harm, then you'd be harming two people aside from yourself: both the person being harmed and the person doing the harm. The Buddha makes an interesting point that if you really want to hurt yourself, you harm other people. And if you want to hurt them, you get them to do harm, because the consequences of doing harm to others is going to last for a long time. If you hit somebody, the pain will go away after a while. But then the kamma of having hit them may last for a long time, even into future lifetimes.

To think in this way about happiness, that's the head part, realizing the practical principle that if your happiness depends on someone else's suffering, it's not going to last.

Then there's the heart part. When you learn how to empathize with others, you see that we're all struggling to find happiness, and all too many of us are causing ourselves suffering in the way we look for happiness. The Buddha saw this and he felt a sense of compassion. The image he had before he went out into the forest was the world was like a dwindling stream with lots of fish fighting one another over the water, each wanting its space in the water and pushing the others out. Of course, everybody's got to die in the end. You realize, when you look around in the world for happiness, that you're not going to find anything that someone else has not lay claim to. But, he said, that doesn't mean you give up your search for happiness. You look inside and you realize the problem lies inside. Nobody else can lay claim there. If you can find the sources for happiness inside, you can solve the problem that's inside without adding to the problems outside.

So thinking in these ways can give rise to a heart state of compassion where you empathize with the sufferings of all beings. You look around: Everybody is suffering. Even people who are wealthy, powerful: They're suffering. Devas up in the heavens are suffering, to say nothing of the ordinary sufferings we see all around us.

This reflection follows the pattern the Buddha uses in teaching mindfulness. First you look at your own mind and your own heart, your own body, and you realize that other people experience the same sorts of things. You have pain in your body, other people have pains in theirs. You have suffering in your own mind, other people are suffering in their minds, too. You

realize that you're causing your suffering by your own lack of knowledge. You think about the other people doing a lot of harm in the world from their own lack of knowledge, their own lack of understanding.

So when you think in these ways, it's a lot easier to give rise to a heart and mind of goodwill for everybody. Wouldn't it be good if all beings could find happiness? Now, we don't expect that everybody's going to find happiness. A brahman once asked the Buddha if everybody was going to gain awakening, and the Buddha didn't answer. The brahman pushed for an answer: "Half the world? A third of the world?" The Buddha still didn't answer. Ven. Ananda was concerned that the brahman might go away dissatisfied: Here he was asking an important question, and the Buddha didn't answer. So he pulled the brahman aside and said, "It's like a large fortress with a wise gatekeeper. He walks around the fortress, and aside from the one gate, he doesn't see any opening in the fortress wall big enough even for a cat to slip through. So he comes to the conclusion that he may not know how many people or large animals are going to come in and out of the fortress but he does know that if they're going to go into the fortress they have to go in by the gate.

It's the same way with the practice. We don't know how many people are going to gain awakening. The Buddha's knowledge is such that if anyone is going to gain awakening, it's going to be through following the path. But how many people are going to follow that? Even he didn't pay attention to that question. People have the ability to choose to practice or not, and there's no way that those choices are foreordained, so the question lies in the realm of the unknowable.

So we can't really place our hopes on everyone's being happy, but we want to make sure that our actions with regard to everyone are an expression of goodwill and would not get in the way of their finding true happiness. Because as we go through the world, we're going to meet a lot of really disagreeable people: people who are cruel, people who are harsh, people who are very selfish, who think only about their own sufferings and don't care about the sufferings they cause to others. But we can't adopt their attitude and wish ill on them.

Our attitude—if we're going to be wise, if we really do want to be happy—is that we're not going to do anything to harm them. And if there's any way we can help to show them the way to true happiness, we're happy to do it.

So as you focus on the breath, try to create a sense of ease inside. That'll make it a lot easier to think these thoughts when you're miserable and hungry and in pain. Sometimes there's a mind state that thinks, "As long as I'm suffering maybe everybody else should, too." That's the wrong way to think. The Buddha set a good example. One time he was attacked. Someone wanted to kill him and so rolled a stone down the mountain. The stone hit another rock and split into splinters. It didn't hit the Buddha but a large sliver of one of

the stones pierced his foot. So he had to lie down and rest. Mara comes up and accuses him of moping around, being miserable, and the Buddha says, “I’m not moping. I’m not miserable. I’m spreading thoughts of goodwill to all beings.”

That’s a good example to follow. You look at your own sufferings and instead of just making your sufferings fill the world and be the only thing that you’re interested in, you think about the fact that other people are suffering, too. That takes away some of the singularity of your own suffering. It puts it into perspective and makes it much smaller. Because if you think everybody else is happy and you’re miserable, your suffering just fills your heart. But if you can enlarge your heart to see that everybody else out there is suffering too—there are many, many people suffering, may they all stop suffering—that takes you away from your own misery and makes your suffering is a lot easier to take. Of course, the Buddha did have the skills of his meditation to help as well, so that the pain in his foot was not the only sensation he had to focus on in his body. He could focus on the well-being of being with his breath.

So learning how to create this sense of well-being is not a selfish pursuit of happiness. Some people think that Buddhism is narrow and selfish, with each Buddhist looking out only for himself, but that’s not the case. If you can find a good solid happiness inside, that means you’re not irritated or frustrated in your search for happiness. People who are irritated and frustrated tend to take that irritation and frustration out on other people. Here you have happiness inside, so you take that “out on” other people, but a better way to put it would be that you take it out and *offer* it to other people too. Your thoughts and words and deeds come from a sense of well-being inside. And those are not afflictive, either to you or to others.

So do what you can to create this sense of well-being as you relate to the body. The Buddha says, once there’s a sense of well-being with the breath, you can think of that spreading to the whole body. Think of breath channels going through the body, down through the nerves, down through the blood vessels. The comfortable breath saturates the whole body, in every cell, out to every pore. That way, you find a harmless happiness inside, which means you’re less likely to lean on other people, less likely to harm them in any way at all. You find that your heart and your mind are working together: Your heart wants happiness; your mind has figured out that this is the best place to find it. So keep your attention focused here, because if you solve the problem here, nothing else is a problem for either the heart or the mind.