

## Worth

October 8, 2012

The world has very strange values. I was reading a while back that some investment bankers in New York think they're the smartest people on the planet. And some hedge fund managers think that the investment bankers are dumb and that *they're* the smartest people on the planet. I must admit the idea that they were the smartest people on the planet never occurred to me. And I wasn't convinced when I heard the idea.

But there's a lot of the world out there that believes that kind of stuff: that getting money is what it's all about, gaining power, gaining fame. This shows that we need an opportunity to get out of our culture for a while. In the old days, they would have rites of passage: When you finally became an adult, you'd wander out away from the village and spend some time out in the wilderness to gain a sense of what your life was about, what was really important. And in our culture we don't have that opportunity aside from the meditation.

Meditation does give you time to sit and be with yourself, to get all of the voices of the world out of your ears, so that you can look at what's really important. If you spend any time out in nature, you begin to realize that people can't be measured by money or fame or power or status. Your worth as a person doesn't depend on these things. It depends on the goodness that you've built into your own mind, into your own heart, into your own character. That's of real worth because it enables you to live with yourself.

That's what the teachings of the perfections are about: the goodness in your heart. The word "perfection" is probably a very bad translation. The Pali word is *parami*. One of its meanings comes from *para*, which refers to something that carries you across—carries you across all the craziness of the world. Another possible root is *param*, which means foremost. In other words, these should be your foremost priorities. Whatever work you take on in life in dealing with your family, dealing with work outside the

home: You want to look at it as an opportunity to develop good qualities of the mind and heart: things like generosity and virtue, persistence, patience, discernment, goodwill, and equanimity. Renunciation, truthfulness, determination. These are all qualities that the heart needs. And they're things that stick with you, in this life on into the next life.

This is where you look for value: your value as a person. Of course, it's not something anyone else can measure, and it has only secondarily value for them. You primarily measure it for yourself. It has a lot to do with how well you can live with yourself. You can gain money, but if you sell out your values to gain the money, it's not really worth the trade. We need to hear this message again and again and again, because all the other contrary messages are being shouted at us: on TV, the radio, internet, internet. We need withstand those messages, and keep in mind that the quality of your character is what really matters.

One of the reasons we meditate is to work on that, to have a center inside so that we're not so easily swayed by other people's opinions that would pull us away from what we know is right and honorable. You've got to learn how to focus your mind, keep it focused on what you know will strengthen the mind. This is why the perfection or parami that underlies all the others is determination, realizing that you want to make something of your mind. And it's going to depend on you.

So you make that determination to do what's right, and you stick with it. First, you make sure that your values are in line with what's right and discerning, and then you've got to be true to yourself, true to what you know is really right, being willing to give up things that are going to stand in the way of what you know is right. Sometimes that means giving up fame in the eyes of others or the opinion that other people have of you. You can't let that sway you. You've got to keep your mind calm as you work toward what you know is right.

To do that requires a really focused mind. This is why it's so important that we learn how to master this technique of just staying here with the breath. Once you learn how to stay with the breath, then you can stay with whatever you know is important in your life and not let

yourself get waylaid.

So it's important that we keep on making the effort to come back, come back and back to the breath. Keep reminding yourselves of why we're here, what we're doing. Don't forget and go wandering off someplace else. After all, where else are you going to draw your strength? We draw our strength from listening to the Dhamma, we draw our strength from the examples of other people. But ultimately we have to find that strength within us. And the meditation helps to develop that strength, because all the things we need in life to work on our character are there in the mind. Simply in some cases they're weak or they're partial. They're not all-around. But we have something to work with. Find that "something" and bring it to bear on the practice. It's through exercising the good qualities of the mind that they grow. It's like exercising your body.

So the technique is not just a technique: It's meant to serve values that are really important, values that give nourishment to the heart, values you can hold onto as things change outside, as your body changes.

As will inevitably happen. When aging, illness, and death come, you're going to need something to hold on to. This is how you build that; this is how you develop that. Especially at that point when you're going to be leaving the body. Two things are going to be overwhelming: pain and distraction. Well, they're precisely the issues we're dealing with as we meditate. How do you let your mind not get scared off by the pain? How do not let it get led around by the nose by distraction. You're gaining practical skill in that right here, right now, as you stay with the breath.

So keep that in mind. This is not just an interesting exercise. It's a life and death matter: how you train your mind. Because at that point, what you're really going to need is a well-trained mind, so that you don't cause yourself suffering, you don't cause suffering for the people around you. So you can develop a refuge inside—i.e., the qualities of the mind you can really depend on when you need them.

So have a sense of how important this is, because when you learn to depend on your own mind there's nothing you have to be afraid of. If you can't depend on your own

mind, that's the biggest thing to fear, because everything then becomes a danger. So to live a life without fear, this is what you've got to do.