Respect

May 23, 2025

Make a survey of your body. How does it feel from the head down to the toes? Are there any patterns of tension? Any pains? Don’t focus on the pains right now. Try to breathe calmly. Then gradually relax the patterns of tension. You might start with your fingers, go up your arms. When you get to the shoulders, then start down at the toes. Go down to the toes and then up, up, up to the legs, the pelvis, the spine. Releasing tension as you go. Then things have been cleared out. Choose any one spot in the body where it feels natural to stay focused. It might be in the middle of the head, the chest, the abdomen. Focus your attention there. Let it stay there for a while. See what kind of breathing feels good there. It could be long breathing, short breathing, fast or slow, heavy or light. Just try to focus. Pay careful attention. Because we’re trying to get ourselves grounded in the body, grounded in the present moment right now. Staying with the breath. Think of the breath not so much as the air coming in and out through the nose, but the flow of energy in the body. Where do you feel that? Which direction does it flow? You might find that one part of the body seems to be flowing in one direction, another part seems to be flowing in another. See if you can bring them into harmony. The whole body is breathing in, the whole body is breathing out, and you’re aware of the whole body. The more you can make your awareness fill the body in the present moment, the less likely it’ll be to go wandering away. Then see if you can maintain that state. The mind tends to be very fickle. You give it something comfortable to stay with, and it’ll be okay for a while. Then it’ll change its mind and say, “I want something different right now.” Try to resist that temptation, although you can feed it a little bit by changing the way you breathe. If you get tired of long breathing, you can try short breathing. If you’re tired of deep breathing, try shallow breathing. Because the needs of the body will change as you settle down. But have some respect for your concentration as we chanted just now. Give it some time. Resist any temptation just to drop it and go after whatever else catches your fancy. That’s one of the things that respect means. You go out of your way. You don’t follow your immediate desires, your immediate likes or dislikes. The Buddha spent his life teaching this teaching, and people have been passing it down now for over 2,000 years because they had respect for it. And why did they ever respect? They found that by giving it their full attention, giving it their time, it really rewarded them. The Buddha calls his teaching a path. But it’s interesting, he doesn’t talk so much about the goal at the end of the path. He talks about the fruit. It’s an odd mixture of images, a path leading to a fruit. But the meaning is that when you get the results of the path, you’re going to enjoy them, just as though you were going to enjoy a nice fruit from a tree. And it’s not the case that the path saves all of its pleasures for the end. Like right now, you can sit here very comfortably. Are there any pains in the body? Think of the breath flowing through them. See if that loosens them up. But try to be here steadily. Again, give it some respect. In this world of instant everything, there’s no instant concentration. There’s no instant insight. These are things that take time. There will come a point where things open up suddenly. But it’s only after a long, gradual practice. Not long here for some people, maybe an hour. For other people it’s going to be longer. The image the Buddha gives is the continental shelf off of India. There’s a gradual slope. And then a sudden drop. The gradual slope comes from refining your powers of discernment. As the mind settles down, you’ll see things more clearly. And you’ll see where you’re holding onto ideas, feelings, that are weighing you down. And you let go of them. But then you’ll find there are other more subtle ones that you’re also… which are also weighing you down. So let go of those. It’s a gradual process. Until you finally hit something that’s really important. And it breaks through a lot of other things. So there will be sudden insights. But you have to do the groundwork. This is what the respect is. This is why we bow down to the Buddha. To remind ourselves that it’s worth going out of our way. To take some time to follow his teachings. Sometimes his teachings seem petty and small. Deals with little things. You look at the rules for the monks. They have a rule for almost everything, it seems. Even how you eat, how you walk. Everything. Sometimes it seems like it’s too much. But if you pay attention and tell yourself, “Oh, the Buddha taught this for a purpose. I may not be able to see the purpose yet, so I’ll give it a try.” Again, that’s the meaning of respect. You don’t have to understand everything before you do it. Because oftentimes it’s in the doing that the understanding comes. So have some respect for your breath. Have some respect for the present moment right now. Have some respect for the quiet moments of the mind. Years back I was at Yosemite. Went up to Glacier Point in the evening. And it seems like they have these websites that tell you where the classic photographs are. Well, it turns out that Glacier Point is one of the classic spots for the evening. It’s got a half dome with the orange light from the sunset. There’s a long line of Nikons on tripods. And after the orange light had left, most of the people left. But then the pink glow of the evening was also very pretty. So I stayed on. There’s one other photographer there. We started talking. He pointed out on the horizon there were four mountains. He was aware of the Chinese. Chinese tradition of the four sacred mountains of China. He said those four mountains in the Sierras were his personal four sacred mountains. He wanted to climb one of them someday. But then he made a comment. He said, “Well, actually, you know, everything is sacred. Everywhere is sacred.” I thought to myself, “That can’t be the case. If everywhere is sacred, where are you going to go to the bathroom?” If everything is sacred, the whole idea of things worthy of respect means that there are some things worthy of more respect than others. So when we have respect for the Buddha, it means we have a little bit less respect for our own desires to think this, think that, do this, do that. He sets out a path that leads to the end of suffering. It’s been tested for thousands of years. We put aside some of our preferences and give a little extra time, a little extra space, a little more patience with the path, and we’ll be amply rewarded. That’s the lesson of respect. If we give respect to the right things, they will bear fruit.

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