

No Happiness Other than Peace

January 30, 2014

There's a passage in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says that there is no happiness other than peace: *N'atthi santi param sukham*. All too often we hear that translated as, "There is no happiness *higher* than peace," which sounds fairly normal. But when the Buddha says there's no happiness other than peace, he's saying something pretty radical.

The pleasures we find in life, many of them are not peaceful, but the fact that the mind can settle on something for a while without feeling forced and being content to stay there: That's where the happiness lies. You look at a job well done, you can keep looking and looking and looking. And when there's nothing pushing you away from looking at the job, you're happy to be there. This could be your own work or the work of other people. Of course, if you're staying with something and you don't like being there, you're feeling forced to be there, there's going to be a struggle and then of course there's no real peace there.

So stillness without struggle: That's where the happiness lies. And because happiness goes together with stillness, this is one of the reasons why one of the factors of the noble path is right concentration. It includes a sense of well-being, happiness, pleasure, ease, well-being. Because if you're going to see anything clearly, the mind has to be still. And together with the stillness, there's a sense of well-being. That's how you know you're properly focused in the present moment: if there's a sense of well-being here. But concentration is not the goal, because there's a certain amount of effort that has to go into keeping the mind concentrated.

And it's an acquired taste. Some people sit here and they're miserable for a whole hour. But what we're learning is how to be here happily, how to create a sense of well-being here, so that we can see clearly what's going on in the mind and figure out where the disturbances are and what's causing them. The more thoroughly you can be here with a sense of well-being, the more refined the disturbances you can see. And it's those subtle ones that can build up that lie at the root of some of the really big disturbances in the mind.

So if you want to head them off before they become big, you have to be able to settle down here with a sense of feeling well-established. You're not going to be pushed off in any direction by anything.

This requires an enlarged state of mind, so once the breath starts feeling comfortable, start thinking of spreading your awareness around the body and allowing that sense of comfortable breath to spread through the body as well. The broader your awareness, the more stable it is. If you're just precariously balanced on one little spot, it's so easy to get tipped over. So think of this as a large foundation, that the foundation of your mind is spreading out and is larger even than your body. You're firmly grounded here on the floor.

Ajaan Fuang used to talk about how much he liked sitting out on the ground. He said he felt his rear end felt rooted deep down into the ground with a sense of real security, a sense of real stability. So think of your awareness going deep down into the Earth, spreading out in all directions, so that nothing can tip it over. And the peace and the happiness will come together.

And you want to learn how to stay here. Again, there's a part of the mind that says, "Okay, enough of that. What's next?" You have to learn how to dissociate yourself from that, to see that as a disturbance. After all, the mind is used to getting its pleasure out of moving around. It stays here for a little while and then, "Okay, enough of that," because things are beginning to change, so you get up and move off someplace else. You begin to take that for granted, that the mind's got to move in order to have some pleasure. Things have to change, so the mind has to change to keep staying happy. But again, things have to change in a very, very particular way for the mind to be content with the change. And all too often the change doesn't go that way.

The reason we like some changes is because the mind feels unobstructed as it goes from one thing to the next. A philosopher once defined happiness as "the free play of your faculties." People talk about being "in the zone," when things go effortlessly. It's not that there's no effort—the effort's there—but it's not being blocked by anything. Everything is smoothly coordinated, and there's no sense that your body's not doing what you don't want it to do. It's that sense of not being obstructed that gives you the pleasure in moving around that way.

But there's a greater peace in learning how to stay here without being obstructed, finding something that you really can stay with for hours at a time. So you have to learn how to dissociate from any thoughts of boredom, thoughts of impatience. You've got to learn how to be here, not just because it's a really pleasant place to stay, but because the more pleasure you have, the more stillness you'll experience. The two go together. And the more stillness, the more clearly you can see the little movements of the mind.

This is why the Buddha's strategy is a strategy of pleasure, learning how to use pleasure for a really good end. You follow his instructions on how to pursue genuine happiness, and you end up developing wisdom, compassion, purity: the same virtues that the Buddha developed himself. Wisdom in realizing that your actions do make a difference in terms of your happiness, and that long-term happiness is better than short. Compassion in realizing that if you want your happiness to last, it can't cause suffering to anybody else. And purity in that you really do look at your actions and their results, making sure that they stay in line with your principles.

So we're here not just for a pleasure hit. We're here learning how to use happiness for really good purposes, getting the mind peaceful and happy so that it can see where it's creating any unnecessary stress and learn how to stop. That's not a small goal. Because you look around you at the world, there are so many ways that people look for their happiness that are not peaceful and that have no compassion, no wisdom, no purity at all. They create a lot of problems. And

when their ideas about how happiness is to be pursued are skewed, then they can take anything, they even take the Buddha's path, and turn it awry.

I'm told that one of the big-circulation magazines has a cover story on mindfulness this week, and that one of the things they talk about is the use of mindfulness in the military. That tells you a lot about our country: that mindfulness goes mainstream when they've found a military use for it. It's a sad thing. If we really practice the Dhamma, we have to keep it line with the Buddha's purpose, which is peace and happiness, wisdom, purity, compassion, all gathered up together.

So learn how to stay here, work with the breath so that there's a sense of wanting to be here, not because you're forced to be here but because it's a really good place to stay—good in many dimensions of the word “good.” It feels good and it's good for you.