

Genuine Happiness

May 5, 2016

We start the meditation with thoughts of goodwill because that's our motivation for being here. We want to find a happiness that's reliable, a happiness that harms no one.

And that kind of happiness has to be found inside. Because a happiness that comes from things outside always involves taking something from someone else. But the happiness that comes from within doesn't take anything away from anyone at all. In fact, it depends on your developing your internal resources. And the more you can develop them, the more you have to share with others.

So it's good to start with that thought, so that when the mind focuses on the breath and part of it wants to wander off, you can remind it, "Where are you going? Are you looking for a genuine happiness or just looking for an ice-cream cone, a piece of candy?"—something that gives pleasure in the immediate present but doesn't really help you in the long term and sometimes can actually harm you.

That thought gives you more impetus to come back to look carefully at the breath. Because that's the next step. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths. Notice where you feel the breathing. Focus your attention there.

Often it'll be in someplace you might not expect. Because the breath is not just air coming in and out of the lungs, it's a flow of energy in the body. It exists on many levels, and the most obvious is the one that allows air to come in and out of the nose. So wherever it seems most blatant, most obvious, focus your attention there.

Then ask yourself, "Does it feel comfortable? Could it feel more comfortable?" You can experiment. Try breathing deep down into the abdomen. Or even further: Think of the breath going all the way down to your feet. You can try heavier breathing or lighter; longer, shorter; faster, slower; deeper or more shallow. See what kind of breathing feels good right now.

You want to give the mind a good place to settle in the present moment. And the more comfortable that place is, the easier it'll be to settle and to stay there.

You're giving the mind some rest but at the same time you're giving it exercise. Because to stay here while you're alert requires that you be mindful.

It's one thing to sit here and basically doze off, but that doesn't accomplish anything. You want to be alert. You want to know what you're doing. And that means that you have to keep reminding yourself, "I want to stay here, stay with

the breath.”

That’s what mindfulness means. It’s a quality of the memory, the faculty of the memory that you apply to the present moment. Right now it’s reminding you, “Stay here, stay here.”

Then you’re alert to what you’re doing. You’re alert to how the breath feels and you’re alert to what the mind is doing: Is it staying with the breath or is it getting ready to move off? If you realize that it’s moved off, then you bring it right back. That’s a quality called ardency. In other words, you try to do this well. You realize that the mind needs to be trained and this is how you do it. It’s one thing to read about concentration and about wisdom and discernment, to decide that they’re nice things. But to actually know them in the mind: That requires that you train the mind, in the same way that you train an animal so that it can live in your house. Sometimes you have to be gentle with it, sometimes you have to be firm.

Making the breath comfortable is a way of being gentle with the mind. If it feels satisfied, feels really gratifying to breathe in, breathe in deeply, breathe in in a way that gives energy to the whole torso, in a way that loosens up any patterns of tension: That’s really inviting. It feels good to stay here.

And you can remind yourself: This is good for the body, getting things aired out like this, allowing the energy to flow smoothly throughout the body.

The firm part is when you find that the mind has started to wander off. You have to remind it: You’re here to train the mind, not to let it wander as it likes. Because there is that temptation: Here you are with a whole hour with your eyes closed. No one else is watching your mind right now. You could do anything you want. It’s very easy to daydream in situations like this. But you say, “No. I want to do something new, something different, to get the mind under control.”

Because if your mind is not under control, it can create a lot of damage. If it is under control, it can take difficult situations and actually make them good.

This is your most important treasure right here: the quality of your mind. So you want to look after it well. And by keeping it with the breath, you’ve got it anchored in the present moment so that it can watch itself. Because you can’t really watch the mind as it’s in worlds of the past and the future unless you have an anchor in the present moment to pull yourself out at least somewhat from those worlds.

This allows you to realize, “Oh, I should be here, not back home or off in some vacation land. I want to be right here.” That’s what the present moment is all about. This is where you are: right here. And the mind that churns out thoughts of the past and the future: It churns them out right here. If you stay with the breath, you get to see the process.

In the beginning, it's very easy to fall into these thought worlds. But as you keep pulling yourself out, pulling yourself out, and you get quicker and quicker at it, you begin to see the machinations of the mind as it's creating a little world for you to go into. You realize that each time you go into a world like this, part of the mind is making a choice that, "Yes, let's go for that," and it jumps right in. You can change that choice.

You begin to see that the mind is not a singular thing. It's more like a committee or a whole corporation: a factory with lots of workers, lots of executives making decisions and doing things, sometimes without the people in the top office knowing what's going on. This is where the top office has to come down and look inside. Otherwise the corporation starts churning out junk, which will bring the corporation down. You want to make sure your factory is producing good things.

In other words, the part of the mind that is shaping the present moment: You want to shape it well. So you have to bring some awareness to what's going on right now.

And you begin to realize there are lots of different voices in there, lots of different opinions in the mind. There are parts of the mind that would like to think about home or think about a vacation land. You want to catch them as they try subvert your main decision, which is to be here and to learn about the mind in the present.

Fortunately, as the mind does get more still, gets more centered, you can notice these voices more clearly. You can catch them in time. This is how you get more control over the mind.

Because the mind can spin out all kinds of thoughts. Often they're fairly innocent, but say when illness comes or aging comes or death or separation comes, the mind can spin out some really destructive thoughts. If you don't have some way of keeping it under control, you can create a lot of unnecessary suffering for yourself. And then it spills out for other people.

So here's your chance to get some insight into how the mind spins out those thoughts, this factory you've got here. Make sure that it's producing only things that are really useful, things of high quality.

We tend to overlook the extent to which our experience of our lives really does depend on what we're doing. We're not just passive recipients. It's not the case that everything that we know comes from outside. We create a lot of our own attitudes from the inside about how to interpret what we're experiencing and what to do with it, what meaning we can make out of it. All of this has to do with our own activities.

If we do all this in ignorance, who knows what's going to come out? But if we bring some awareness to it, we can actually bring some order to it and take this mind of ours which is so good at creating suffering for itself and turn it around so it creates well-being. And it's a type of well-being that harms no one at all. The more you have, the more it's going to spill over, to help other people.

So if part of the mind is saying, "Well, this is selfish, just focusing on your breath right now," you say, "Nope, that's not the case." You're taking care of business. The business is looking at how you shape your experience and learning how to shape it in a better way.

We start with the breath, and with our mindfulness around the breath and our alertness and our ardency to shape something new and better in the present moment: a state of concentration where the mind feels centered and stable with a sense of well-being. It feels really at home here.

So keep this in mind: that we're here for a genuine happiness. And the breath is going to be our gathering point to keep us anchored in the present moment, so that we can understand what the mind is doing to cause suffering and what it could do to create happiness.

Years back, I was at a commemoration for Ajaan Lee's passing. And we'd invited a monk from Bangkok to give a talk to close the ceremonies. The time arrived when he was supposed to get up in the Dhamma seat and he wasn't there yet. We got a phone call from him saying that he was stuck in traffic, asking that we invite someone else to give the talk instead.

So we invited another ajaan, a monk from the forest. He got up and he talked about how the Buddha's teachings were all about suffering. He finished the talk and, not long afterwards, the original monk arrived, so they invited him up to give another talk. And not having heard the first talk, he gets up and says, "The Buddha's teachings are all about happiness."

And the thing is, both of them were right. The purpose is happiness, it's not to cause suffering. The purpose is to help us create happiness, and to find a happiness that lies even deeper that doesn't have to be created. But to find that happiness, to develop the path to that happiness, we have to understand suffering. That means we have to understand what our minds are doing right now to create suffering, because that's the suffering that weighs the mind down.

The pains that come in from outside, the misfortunes out there in the world: They don't have to make us suffer. It's what we do as we find out about them and we deal with them: That's where the suffering comes that weighs us down. So when we understand this process well, then we don't have to suffer that way.

These are some of the things we can learn and master as we get more and more

focused on the breath.

So start exploring. There's an awful lot here.