

## *Right Resolve*

*November 22, 2007*

The more skillful you are in your search for happiness, the lighter you tread on this Earth—because you realize that happiness, to be true and lasting, has to be harmless, something that doesn't take anything away from anyone else. Which means that it has to come from within.

So that's what we're doing as we meditate: We're looking for a harmless happiness. This is a very important way of being kind to others. Sometimes meditation is denounced as a selfish activity because you seem to be just looking after yourself. But people who know how to look after themselves are less of a burden on other people. That's why these skills are an expression of kindness.

There's a passage where the Buddha says that right resolve, which is one of the factors of the path, finds its highest expression in doing right concentration. In other words, you have to reflect on the fact that your quest for happiness is going to have to depend on your own actions, and you don't want to harm anybody else in the course of the quest. Because your actions come from your resolves, you have to reflect on which resolves might be harmful. Some of them involve wanting to commit outright violence to other people, or having ill will for other people. Some of the them involve being attached to sensual desires—because, as the Buddha once said, even if it rained gold coins, we wouldn't have enough for our sensual desires. If that's where we're looking for happiness, there's no end to it. And how many showers of gold coins have you seen? And how many showers would we need to satisfy every person, every animal on earth? With no sense of satisfaction, we're bound to get into conflict with one another over what few gold coins there are. There's no way that a true happiness can be found that way.

So you try to learn how to wean yourself away from sensual desires. And the best way to do that is to find a sense of pleasure within. This is why the Buddha taught right concentration. It's not just that you focus on your mind, but you focus in a way that gives rise to a sense of ease, a sense of rapture. In this way you satisfy your immediate need for pleasure at the same time that you're developing clarity in the mind. When our pleasure depends on harming other beings, we tend to have big blind spots around the harm we're doing. We can think of all sorts of ways to justify the harm we cause to other beings or to other people in the course of our quest for pleasure. In doing so, we built up huge areas of denial and ignorance in our mind. But when your pleasure depends on things that are causing no harm at all, you can be clearer about where there is harm in the world, where there is conflict, because your happiness doesn't depend on that harm or conflict.

So what you've got here is a happiness that's blameless and also very clear: the ideal happiness to form part of the path. So focus on the breath in a way that feels comfortable. Focusing on the breath is called directed thought. Learning how to make it comfortable is

called evaluation. These are the two factors that help build concentration. The third factor is singleness: that you really focus on the breath and try to stay with the breath and nothing else.

These are the three things you focus on developing.

Notice how the breath feels in the different parts of the body. Here we're not talking just about the air coming in and out of the lungs, but also about the whole energy flow, the subtle movement of the body, as the breath comes in, the breath goes out. Try to notice: Do you tense up as you breathe in? Do you hold on to tension as you breathe out? Can you breathe in in a way that doesn't build up tension? Can you breathe out in a way that's not holding on to tension?

First you want to start out at one spot in the body where it's easy to get a sense of the breath coming in, the breath going out, or the movement of the body as you breathe in, as you breathe out. Learn how to relate to that spot so that you stay with it but are not clenching up around it, so that there's a sense of openness and fullness right there in that spot—fullness in the sense that the blood is allowed to flow naturally without being squeezed and diverted. This is a skill. For most of us, when we concentrate on some part of the body, we tense it up in order to maintain a sensation we can stick with. But here you want to maintain a sense of openness and stick with that.

Learn how to stick with that sense, so that you can keep that sense of openness and fullness all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out. When you can maintain that, move to other parts of the body. You can do this systematically. You might start, say, at the navel, or the base of the throat, or the back of the neck. If you start at the navel, go up the front of the body, then down the back, out the legs. Then from the back of the neck, down the shoulders, and out the arms. Or if you start at the back of the neck, you can go down the back first, out the legs, down the shoulders and out the arms, and then the down front of the torso, taking the body section by section, to see if there's any section where you tend to hold onto tension with the out-breath or the in-breath, and training yourself to breathe in such a way that there's no holding on, so that things are allowed to flow smoothly. The breath flows smoothly, the blood flows smoothly, and there's a sense of ease all the way through the breathing process.

Some people at this point begin to get a sense of floating, but try not to drift out. You can float and be buoyant, but stay in place. There's a sense of lightness and buoyancy, so keep that sense of lightness, but stay where you are. You've learned to breathe in such a way that the whole body feels at ease throughout the in-breath and out-breath. Try to maintain that sense of awareness of the whole body, and let the pleasure radiate out through the body. Just learn how to maintain that, to stick with it. If you find yourself losing focus when you open up your range of awareness to the whole body, go back to surveying the body spot by spot, section by section, and then try settling down with the whole body again. You may find yourself going back and forth like this for a while until you feel comfortable and stable staying with the whole body. Even though there's a sense of ease and lightness, there's also a solidity to your focus. In other words, it's steady. It doesn't get moved around easily.

At this point, you want to maintain a sense of being focused primarily on one spot in the body, but aware of the whole body. It's like looking at a painting. Your eyes may focus on one

spot in the painting, but you can see the whole painting, even though you're focused on one spot.

And here you have it: right resolve, the intention to stick with the meditation. You're not harming anyone; you feel no ill will for anyone. You don't need to think about sensual pleasures. This is the embodiment of right resolve. And this sense of ease and happiness forms the path. It's your nourishment on the path. In the texts, they talk about the different aspects of the path being like different aspects of a fortress. Mindfulness is like the gatekeeper; wisdom is like the smooth walls that nobody can climb up to cause danger. And right concentration is like the food you have stored away to keep yourself nourished. This way, as you develop skill in your pursuit of happiness, you find that you need fewer things outside. There's less need to compete with others over things outside. Your hungers and addictions lose a lot of their force and their sharpness, because you've got a good alternative source of pleasure right here.

This is how we tread lightly on the Earth. We're finding our happiness inside and a sense of buoyancy and ease inside, so we have less and less need for pleasures outside. So take the time and energy needed to develop this skill, because it will serve you well throughout life.