

A Special Happiness

December 25, 2012

Close your eyes. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths. Watch your breath as it comes in; watch your breath as it goes out.

You can think *Buddho* along with the breath: *Bud-* in, *-dho* out. It means “awake.” It’s a quality you want to develop. You want to be awake right here in the present moment, alert to what’s going on.

This is one of the ways of developing happiness. People are talking a lot about happiness and merriness today, but what are the causes of happiness? There’s generosity, there’s virtue, and then there’s developing the mind. Those are the things that give rise to a happiness that’s lasting.

The happiness you get from presents or the happiness you get from parties and things: That doesn’t last very long. But the happiness that comes from really doing something good and knowing that you did something good: You think about it beforehand, you’re happy; you think about it while you’re doing it, you’re happy; after you’re done, you’re still happy that you did it: That kind of happiness is hard to find.

So when the Buddha says that these are the ways of finding true happiness, you want to look into it and try to develop the causes for happiness as much as you can. In this way, opportunities to be generous, opportunities to hold to your principles, are opportunities to find happiness.

Now, “generosity” here doesn’t mean just being generous with things, although it often starts that way. You also learn to be generous with your time, generous with your knowledge, generous with your forgiveness, and just giving fairness to one another. That’s a gift, too.

These ways of finding happiness are special because not only is the happiness lasting but it’s a happiness that doesn’t have any clear boundaries. When you’re happy because you got a present or you’re happy because you got this position or because you got this, that or the other thing, you’re the one who gains it but other people may have to lose. It’s a happiness that’s specifically for you but doesn’t necessarily spread around to other people.

But the happiness that comes from being generous: That spreads around. You’re happy that people who receive the results of your generosity are happy: the world is a much better place as a whole. The same with virtue: It’s a gift to yourself and to other people at the same time.

The same with the meditation: It, too, is a gift. You’re training your mind to be

less overcome by greed, less overcome by anger, less overcome by delusion. So you're bound to act in ways that are good for you and better for other people, too.

So these forms of happiness, which the Buddha called merit: It's not as if they're Brownie points or Girl Scout badges. It's the merit of a mind that knows how to find happiness in the right way: in a way that's lasting, in a way that doesn't create boundaries, in a way that actually erases boundaries between people.

That kind of happiness is something special: It really should be something you pay a lot of attention to, where you focus a lot of your energies in life. Because there are so many areas of life where we focus our energy and we don't have much to show for it. But the energy that goes into being generous, the energy that goes into being virtuous, the energy that goes into developing the mind through meditation: That pays off all around.