

The Motivation for the Practice

November 18, 2014

We always start with thoughts of goodwill because that reminds us of our motivation for practicing. We want a happiness that doesn't harm anyone. And that kind of happiness is special.

You can think of all the different ways that people find happiness that cause a burden for others, a burden on the environment. But the happiness that comes from within doesn't have to take anything away from anyone else at all. It's totally blameless, because it's not only harmless to others but it also keeps your mind clear. You're alert, you know what you're doing, you can see clearly what's happening inside, and you learn how to train your mind from within.

These days there are doctors who will give you all kinds of drugs to adjust your mood from without, but that doesn't require any discernment, and you don't develop any discernment that way. The happiness you gain that way is very undependable.

But when you can learn to adjust your mood from within, noticing where you're thinking about things that are weighing yourself down and how you can let go of those things and still be at ease, still have a sense of well-being: That's an important skill.

We do that because we want a happiness that's true. In other words, we have goodwill for ourselves: We don't want to spend all our time on a happiness that is going to desert us or is going to cause us to do unskillful things.

At the same time, we want a happiness that's a good example for others, so that other people can see, "Oh yeah, there is a happiness to be found that doesn't require money and doesn't require status and doesn't require fame." In fact, it's better off without those things. That's a good message for the world.

So as we meditate, remember that our motivation is based on goodwill: a wish for true happiness both for ourselves and for others. Remembering that motivation helps keep our practice in line.