

Completing Your Merit

December 7, 2014

Close your eyes and watch your breath. When the breath comes in, know it's coming in. When it goes out, know it's going out. Try to keep your mind there with the breath each time it comes in, each time it goes out.

You're trying to develop mindfulness. You're trying to develop concentration. The mind needs these powers in all the work that we do: whether it's the work of the religion or the work of the world. We need mindfulness, we need concentration, in order to complete the work.

Today we've come to make merit to dedicate to those who've passed away. We have to realize: What is merit? Merit, basically, is the happiness that comes from knowing you've done something well, you've done something good. The three ways of really doing good—in other words, finding happiness that doesn't harm anybody—are to be generous, to observe the precepts, and to meditate, develop good qualities in the mind.

The most important of those is developing good qualities in the mind, because everything else comes out of the mind. As the Buddha said, "*Mano-pubbangama dhamma, mano-settha, mano-maya*": Everything comes out of the mind and is made good by the mind. So if the quality of the mind is good, then the merit we make is good, the merit we dedicate to others is good.

This merit we dedicate to others is not a package that you can put in the mail and send. It's a quality of the mind that impinges on the mind of the person who passed away. We can reach one another through the currents of the mind, so you want to make sure that the current you're sending out is a good current: a current of concentration, a current that's wise, a current that's clear, a current that has a sense of well-being inside. That's the current you're sending, so make sure that it has that good quality.

We do that by practicing meditation. You want to do this every day. We look after our bodies every day: We wash them, we brush our teeth. The question is: Do we look after our minds every day? If we're not, we're neglecting the most important thing that we have. After all, the body, as it grows up, gets old and then it gets sick and then it dies, as we see all around us. This has happened to other people; it's going to happen to us.

But the mind doesn't have to follow in that way. It doesn't have to get sick. The sicknesses of the mind, of course, are greed, aversion, and delusion. The mind doesn't have to get old, it doesn't have to get to the point where it just doesn't have

any energy to do good. And it doesn't have to die. The mind just keeps going on and on and on. Even with the death of the body, the mind keeps going on. The question is, when it does go on, is it going to go in a good condition or a bad one? This all depends on the shape that you put it in right now.

So try to work on getting the mind in good shape every day, every day, every day. Take some time to meditate to make sure that your merit both for yourself and that you're going to be dedicating to others is complete merit. If your merit is incomplete, it's like an incomplete package: You've sent a gift to somebody else but when they open it up they find that the batteries are missing or parts of it are missing. You don't want to send a present like that. You want to send something that's complete and can be used right away.

So you want to make sure that your merit is complete: in your generosity, in your virtue, and in the good qualities you develop in your meditation.

Learn how to spread goodwill to yourself and goodwill to others, and then live in line with that goodwill by finding a happiness inside that doesn't harm anybody: doesn't harm yourself, doesn't harm others.

Because the happiness of the world, as we all know, often depends on harming other people—or it harms your own mind: You get addicted to something and your mind gets clouded by it.

But the happiness that comes from doing good is a clear happiness. It doesn't weigh on anybody else. It doesn't need to take anything away from anyone else. And it leaves your mind clear so that you can see what you're doing and understand what you're doing that's right, that's wrong, that's skillful and unskillful. And you've got the energy to do what's skillful and to let go of what's not.

So this practice of training the mind is an important part of making sure that your merit is complete. That's the one thing we have that really is ours when we go on to the next life. All the material things you've developed in this lifetime: You've been looking after your body, you've got to leave that. The material things around you: You've got to leave all those things.

But, as the Buddha said, when you've done good things, the good deeds you've done await you on the other side like relatives await someone, a member of the family, who's been missing for a long time: They're happy to see you and they do their best to make sure that you're happy.

And where do you get those good deeds? You get them by doing them right now. You've got the opportunity right now. We don't know how many more days or months or years we have to live, but we *do* know we have this moment, this day, right now.

So make the most of it. Make sure that your merit is complete, so that when you have to depend on it yourself, you've got a complete set of things to depend on. When you're giving it to someone else, it's a gift you can be proud to give.