

Using Your Wealth

August 30, 2015

Close your eyes. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths. Stay with the sensation of the breathing all the way in, all the way out. If long breathing feels good, stay with long breathing. If it doesn't, you can change the rhythm: Make it shorter, deeper, more shallow, heavier, lighter, faster, slower. Find a way of breathing that feels good right now and allow that sense of comfort to spread through the body. Relax around the breath.

We have these potentials for happiness in life and if we don't make the most of them, then we get discouraged and we resent other people's happiness, too. So here's an opportunity to develop some very basic resources that you have with you all the time, so that wherever you are, you can relax into the breath no matter what the situation is, and at the very least you'll have that amount of pleasure to nourish the mind.

This ability to find pleasure where it's skillful is an important skill to have in life, because otherwise we go looking for unskillful pleasures. This fits in with the Buddha's instructions on how to find happiness in this lifetime. They start with being industrious; taking good care of the things you've earned through your labor; associating with admirable friends; and then the fourth one, which we'll talk about today: conducting your life in a way that's appropriate, appropriate to the income you've got. You don't splurge too much on things, but at the same time you're not too stingy.

It's easy to understand why the Buddha would teach you not to splurge. If you're always in debt, then you're constantly a slave to the people who control your debt. Even time becomes something that's on their side rather than yours: the longer the time goes, the more you have to pay. At the same time, the resources you would have to devote to something really good get wasted on things that really don't have any substance to them at all. Because our food, clothing, shelter and medicine: These things just go, go, go, go, go and there's not much left to show for them. What do we have to show for all the food we've eaten? We've got just a lot of stuff in the sewers. So you don't want to throw all your money down the sewer. You want to keep some of it to use for things that are good: helping other people, helping causes that you feel are really worthwhile.

So it's easy to understand why the Buddha would say not to splurge and not to be wasteful in your money.

But at the same time, he encourages you not to be too frugal. If you're too frugal, you don't get any real happiness out of your wealth, and at the same time you begin to resent other people's happiness. You begin to see pleasure as something bad. And if you see it as something bad, then no matter where you go you just don't feel right about finding pleasure. This will get in the way when you meditate.

So you look at what's the right way to live your life in line with your income, both your internal income and your external income. Your external income, of course, is the money you earn from your work. Your internal income doesn't necessarily have any limits. You can find a sense of well-being with the breath and you can take that with you wherever you go. The more you can find, the better. Because as you look for pleasure in life, you want to look for it in areas that are not harmful to the mind. It's not the amount of pleasure that's harmful, it's the *type* of pleasure that can be harmful; the ways you look for pleasure can be harmful. So you want to make sure you find pleasure in a way that's harmless. This is why the Buddha recommends that you practice generosity, that you're virtuous, and that you meditate, because these kinds of pleasure are totally harmless.

So try to have a sense of proportion in the way you look for happiness in life and the way you use your wealth to find pleasure, so that you do get some pleasure out of your wealth and you learn how to appreciate it. That helps you look with kindly eyes on the pleasures of other people. And that way it becomes easier to become generous. If you're stingy with yourself, you get stingy with other people. And as the Buddha said, if you're stingy, you can't even attain right concentration, much less any of the higher attainments.

So try to find the appropriate medium of skillful pleasure that can keep you going. If things outside are not all you want in terms of physical pleasure, well, start looking inside: the pleasure that can come from being generous, being virtuous, and from meditating. On that kind of pleasure, the Buddha places no limits. It's good for you all the way down the line.