

The Antidote for Victimhood

May 18, 2016

Start the day with thoughts of goodwill.

It's easiest when you've learned how not to place unnecessary burdens on your own mind.

So breathe deeply, breathe comfortably. Try to establish a sense of well-being here in the present. Sometimes you establish a sense of well-being first and then you spread thoughts of goodwill. Other times, you've got to remind yourself, "This is why I practice."

You realize that in the practice you're not harming anybody. You're not harming yourself, you're not harming other people. You're looking for a happiness that's blameless. That thought makes it easier to settle down.

So the two practices go together: getting the mind settled with the breath and spreading thoughts of goodwill. But don't save the goodwill only for times when you're feeling at ease.

There was one time when the Buddha was wounded by a stone sliver. That rock that Devadatta hurled down a mountain didn't hit the Buddha but it did smash into slivers, and one of the slivers went right through the Buddha's foot. So he had to lie down and rest.

Mara came to taunt him saying, "Are you lying there moping?" And the Buddha said, "No, I'm not moping. I'm spreading thoughts of goodwill to all beings."

When you can think that way, you get yourself out of your personal narratives about: "Why did they do this? Why did they do that? And why am I hurt? Why am I suffering? Why am I in pain, when other people are walking around okay?"

The Buddha didn't have any thoughts like that at all. It was simply, "Goodwill for all beings." That helps to lighten a lot of the loads on the mind.

So whether you're feeling good or not, try to extend goodwill to all. That way, you feel like less of a victim. You're more in charge of your situation. And that's what the practice is all about: putting you in charge of your mind, the situation inside.

There's a part of us that each of us has that nobody else can reach: your own experience of how things look to you and how things feel to you, how things sound. Each of us has our own personal world of this sort. It's right in this personal world that we're making ourselves suffer, but it's also right in this personal world where we can put an end to that suffering.

That's what the Buddha's trying to reach into. He can't reach there directly. But can give you advice: "This is how you learn not to make yourself suffer." And it's in our recognition that we're doing that: That's what opens us up to listening to his message.

So, straighten out things inside. That makes you not only lighter for yourself but also lighter on the world.