

Start with Peace

June 13, 2016

Okay, let's sit and meditate for a few minutes.

Bring your mind to the breath and try to settle down here. Make the breath a comfortable place to stay, so that the body and the mind can be at peace with each other.

If you've put too much pressure on the focus of your concentration, the body feels uncomfortable. If you don't put enough, the mind starts floating away. So you have to find what's just right.

Thinking about making the breath comfortable helps the mind and the body to live together well, so that they can be at peace with each other.

We live in a world where there's a strong lack of peace. So where are we going to find it? We have to find it inside. If there's going to be peace outside, it has to start inside. So we start right here.

We live in a world where there's a lot of hatred. But we can't respond with hatred, we have to respond with peace ourselves. It's only through non-hatred—in other words, by not responding in a hateful way and actually responding with goodwill—that that karmic cycle of hatred will stop. Otherwise, it just accelerates until it explodes, and then people say, "Gee, that was stupid!" They remember it for a while and then they forget and they start accelerating it again.

So we want to step outside of that. Regardless of what other people are doing, we're not going to respond with hatred, we're not going to respond with ill will. If we have genuine goodwill for ourselves, we have to have goodwill for others. Because it's only through goodwill for others that we can be sure that our actions are going to be skillful and that we're not going to be harming ourselves with our actions.

So try to create a good sense of peace inside and learn how to maintain that sense of peace in spite of what's going on outside. The Buddha's teaching that "Hatred doesn't end with hatred, it ends with non-hatred," is not for times when there's no hatred around. It's for you to remember when things are really bad, in anticipation that there will be times when the world goes up and down.

If you've got the time and the space now to train the mind, train it so that it doesn't respond in unskillful ways. That way, you have something to hold on to when things are not going so well.

The teachings are here not only for when they're easy to follow. They're here for when things are hard. But they remind you that this is the noble, this is the

honorably, this is the wise way to act: Always start with peace, a sense of peace and well-being inside.

So try to develop that if it's not there and maintain it if you've got it. This is what the meditation is for: learning to maintain it. You maintain it not only while you're sitting here with your eyes closed but also when you get up, walk around, and deal with other people. Try to have that sense of well-being and sense of stillness inside that you can depend on. That's your strength. When we're coming from strength, we tend to do more skillful things. When we come out of a sense of fear and weakness: That's when we lash out.

So, make sure that you're coming from strength. You've got the strength of concentration, the strength of mindfulness, all these good qualities of mind that give you the energy you need, so that regardless of what other people are doing, you're going to do the skillful thing. And that skillful thing will be yours.

Remember: Each of us has his or her own actions. That's why we chant that so often, "I am the owner of my actions." What actions do you have? Are they actions you want to be the owner of? In some cases, the actions are things we want to deny having done.

It's like giving birth to children and deciding you don't like the children and you try to run away from them. They're going to come following after you.

So as long as you're going to be giving rise to actions, give rise to good ones. That's what we're doing all the time: We're making choices in our thoughts and our words and our deeds, so make sure that they're choices you can live with over the long-term. Which means that this is a principle not only when things are easy but also—and especially—when things are hard.

Hold on to the Dhamma. As they say, "Those who follow the Dhamma are protected by the Dhamma." It's not that the Dhamma is going to run around and clean up your messes. What it means is that if you act in line with the Dhamma, you don't have any messes to clean up.

That's how you can go with a sense of well-being, at peace, offering something good to the world at all times.