

The Perfection of Generosity

July 24, 2016

Okay, let's meditate for a few minutes.

Close your eyes and watch your breath. As it comes in, watch it going in. As it goes out, watch it going out. See what kind of breathing feels comfortable right now. Try to stay with the breathing as consistently as you can.

If you leave it for a bit, just come right back. Try to catch yourself as you're leaving or even as you're about to leave. Just stick with the breath.

Make the breath as interesting and as comfortable as you can. The breath is not just air coming in and out of the lungs. It's the energy flow in the body, and that energy flow has a huge impact on your health, both the health of the body and the health of the mind. So it should be interesting to see if you can make that energy flow feel good. What kind of rhythm would feel good? What kind of texture of breathing: deep or shallow, heavy or light? See what breathing feels good right now.

You're taking care of business inside when you're doing this. And it's a gift to other people.

The Buddha starts all of his teachings with the act of giving. You start with outside things and then you move to inside things. In terms of outside things, you give either material help, the help of your knowledge, the help of your energy, or the help of your time....

You can give the gift of forgiveness: For some reason this is one of the hardest to give. It doesn't require any money, you don't have to be wealthy in order to give forgiveness, and yet it's often the stickiest thing in the mind as you resent what someone else has done and you carry it around. Just let that go. It's not anything good for you. And forgiveness doesn't mean you have to love the other person, simply that you're not going to seek revenge, you're not going to keep complaining about it. Learn how to give that kind of gift.

Then there's the gift of training your mind. First you train the mind through the precepts. The Buddha said this is a universal gift: You're not going to kill anybody, you're not going to steal anything from anybody, have illicit sex with anybody, lie to anybody, take intoxicants at any time. That way you're giving protection to other people. They're being protected from your misbehavior. And you're being protected as well. As the Buddha said, when you give this universal gift, you have a share in it, too.

Then you further train the mind through the meditation. You see greed, anger,

and delusion coming up in the mind and you begin to recognize them: These are things you don't need to go with. We go running with these things ordinarily as they come up in the mind and they can create a lot of damage, both in our own lives and in the lives of other people.

So as you meditate, as the mind gets more quiet, you begin to see the movements of the mind. You can see when something is coming up that's not going to be good. The meditation gives you the strength to say No. In doing that, you benefit, and the people around you benefit as well.

This is the kind of happiness that the Buddha has us search for: a happiness that we share with other people. There are all kinds of happiness in the world where, when you gain something, somebody else has to lose it. You gain wealth, you gain status, you gain praise, somebody else has to lose those things. Or they gain it and you lose them. That kind of happiness creates divisions and boundaries.

But the happiness where you gain and other people gain at the same time: That's what tears the boundaries down. It's as if you're making everybody in the whole world part of one big family. They may not fully appreciate what you've done, but at the very least your happiness is not impinging on them. It's not causing them any trouble. And in that way your happiness becomes a gift to others. That's really special when you can be happy and other people have a share in that happiness, too.

So try to find ways in which you can be generous outside and inside. because it's what brings the world to peace. We're not going to be made peaceful through having big armies or the typical types of defence that people tend to think about. It's not through power that the world becomes peaceful. It's through generosity that we become peaceful.

So learn how to be generous with what you can spare. If you don't have material things to spare, you've still got your knowledge, you've got your time, you've got your energy, the power of forgiveness, the power of training the mind. All these are good ways of being generous.

Develop what's called the perfection of generosity: when you find it easy to give. You're not constantly calculating who's winning and who's losing. It's something that's for the good of everybody, because everybody benefits when you're generous in these ways.