

Respecting the Dhamma Together

December 25, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Try to breathe in a way that feels good all the way in, all the way out. It's good to start with a couple of good long deep in- and-out breaths, and then adjust things to see what feels just right.

See if you can stay there and get a sense of pleasure and refreshment from the breath. Because here it is: an opportunity to find some pleasure and some happiness, some well-being right here. It doesn't cost any money, you don't have to buy it from anybody, you don't have to take it from anybody. As the Buddha said, it's a perfectly blameless happiness. And it makes the mind clear. It's not like other forms of pleasure in the world, which tend to get the mind all muddy. When the mind is here, it's clear and has a good sense of well-being. It can see things a lot more clearly for what they actually are.

So try to stay here. And if your mind wanders off, ask yourself, "Where are you going? What trouble are you trying to look for?" Because often that's what happens when the mind leaves the breath, when it leaves the Dhamma: It's looking for trouble. It may not intentionally think that way, but it's going to stir things up. It's usually because it's not getting any satisfaction right here right now, so it's looking for someplace else where it might get some satisfaction. So try to breathe in a way that feels really satisfying.

Think about how good it is that the mind can find a happiness like this. So much of the other happiness and pleasure we find in the world requires conflict. You gain something; somebody else loses it. They gain; you lose. And there's never enough for anybody. As the Buddha once said, even if it rained gold coins, it wouldn't be enough for one person's desire for sensual pleasures.

So it's best that we look inside where there's no need for conflict. When you're wandering away from this good source of happiness, the mind is looking for trouble. In fact, this is one of the general principles of the Buddha's teachings: we look for happiness in terms of generosity, we look for happiness in terms of virtue and in terms of developing good qualities of the mind. If we're looking for happiness someplace else, we're looking for trouble.

This is one of the reasons why the world doesn't have any peace. Very few people are looking for happiness inside, they're looking for it outside. There's going to be constant struggle, constant strife. But we don't have to struggle and strive along with them. We can find a happiness inside. As the Buddha says, we live in a world where people are arguing but we don't have to argue with them, people are hungry for pleasures but we don't have to be hungry for those kind of pleasures. We've got something better inside. We've got the fullness, we've got the rapture that can come, the refreshment that comes from staying with the Dhamma. That's our guide, that's our guidepost. This is what brings us all together.

Here we are, people of lots of different nationalities, lots of different languages. But what brings us together is the fact that we all see the goodness of the Dhamma and we're going to give ourselves over to the Dhamma. This is what unites our hearts. This is why we've been able to build this monastery. No one person could do it alone. A lot of people had to help. We came together because we see that it's not just for the sake of any one particular person, it's for the sake of the Dhamma. We have our respect for Ajaan Suwat, but again, why do we respect him? It's because he respected the Dhamma. So having respect for the Dhamma is what pulls people together, holds people together. That's how we can live together in peace.

Every year, this time of year, people talk about peace and goodwill. Well, this is something we work on all year round, by giving ourselves over to the Dhamma, seeing that this is what pulls us together, brings us together, so that each person finds genuine satisfaction. It's not like other things where people band together and one person gains a little bit of this and another person gains a little bit of that and nobody gains any real satisfaction. Here we're looking for satisfaction in the Dhamma, and it's all open to us. The opportunities for generosity are here, the opportunities for virtue, the opportunities for meditation: They're all here. And as we avail ourselves of them, we become part of a larger movement, the movement that's been going ever since the time of the Buddha himself. After all, we respect the Buddha. Who did he respect? He respected the Dhamma. And this respect has been passed on from generation to generation. This is why there's still goodness in the world: our respect for things that are more than just our own opinions and more than just the opinions of the society around us. We see the genuine goodness of the Dhamma, and this is what holds us together, both inside each individual and as a group.

So try to maintain that respect for the Dhamma, not only while you're here at the monastery but also as you go through life. It's what provides true happiness, a happiness that doesn't stir up any trouble. A happiness that brings peace to you and to the world around you.