

Acts of Goodwill

February 1, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath, all the way in, all the way out.

It's a way of showing goodwill to yourself and goodwill for others. Goodwill to yourself in the sense that you make the breath as comfortable as you can and the mind has a good place to settle down. Once it's settled down, then it can look at its actions a lot more clearly and see what should and shouldn't be done.

So it's not just that this is a pleasant abiding, as the Buddha said. It's also a place to develop mindfulness and alertness. The mind's not just resting. It's also gathering strength so that it can see its duties more clearly and have the strength to do them.

That's how this translates into goodwill for others. If you have less greed, aversion, and delusion in the mind, less of it comes out in your actions, so the people around you will benefit as well.

So the determination on thoughts of goodwill underlies the whole practice. After all, the Buddha taught a path to the end of suffering because he had goodwill for all beings. He'd found the path himself: That was goodwill for himself. Then he wanted to share it with other people. He could have focused on all kinds of other things but he saw that this was the most useful and the most beneficial teaching to give. So it comes out of goodwill.

So as we practice, we're showing goodwill for ourselves, goodwill for others. Goodwill spreads around. It's because of goodwill that we can live together as human beings. So make sure that you develop it. Not just with thoughts of goodwill but also acts of goodwill: in other words, doing things that will actually lead to your benefit and the benefit of people around you.

Getting the mind centered and still is one good way to start. Because, as I said, you see more clearly what's right and what's wrong, what's proper and improper, and you also have the strength to follow through with that knowledge—and the desire to follow through with it, too.

So work on this practice of training your mind. You realize that it spreads its goodness in lots of ways you may not have anticipated. Make sure you get the causes right, and the results will take care of themselves. They're bound to be good. Whether they come quickly or slowly, and to whatever extent they can spread out in the world, don't worry about that right now. Just make sure that you've got the causes right, and the results will sort themselves out.