

## *The Benefits of Refuge*

*February 26, 2017*

Close your eyes and try to stay right here in the present moment with the breath. Give the mind a good place to stay.

The mind needs a good solid place to stay. Because when we live in this world as soon as there's birth there are always the things that follow on birth, i.e., aging, illness, death. The mind has to deal with these things and learn how not to suffer from them.

That's the skill that the Buddha taught. He didn't say there was any way to stop aging or stop illness or stop death. These things can happen regardless. No matter how advanced science gets, it's not going to be able to stop these things. So we have to be prepared for them, realizing that the things we tend to hold to are going to age, grow ill, and die. As long as we hold on to them, as long as we identify with them, we're going to suffer. So we have to learn how to let go of them. We have to find something better to hold on to.

This is why we practice. Try to get the mind in a good state of concentration so that it can have its own place to stand. Then it can look at these other things and realize, okay, the things that age, grow ill, and die have their uses. We're not going to just run away from them. We use them to create good things: We use them to be generous. We use our body to be generous; we use our thoughts to be generous, to be virtuous. This does good in the world and it does good for us as well.

But if we identify with these things, then as soon as they seem threatened then it's very hard to continue doing the good. So you have to realize that these things are not really yours, they're not really your self. They're things that you've got some control over for the time being. You've borrowed them, so you want to take good care of them. Someone came to Ajaan Lee and said, "My friends tell me, 'You say that everything is not-self. So why can't we hit you if your body is not really yours?' How should I respond?" Ajaan Lee told him to say, "This body is something I've borrowed. I've got to take good care of it, so that I can return it to the owners in good shape."

Now, returning the body in good shape doesn't mean that you have to preserve it. What it means is that you use it well, use it for the purpose of generosity, for the purpose of virtue, for the purpose of training your mind, knowing that there will come a time when you have to let it go. That's getting good use out of it. But if you latch on to it, then because you're latched on to something easily threatened, you start doing unskillful things: You start breaking the precepts, you start being stingy, and the mind suffers. It creates the causes for suffering for itself and for others. So you have to learn how to step out of these things.

So realize that your own body, your family, your friends, the way things are around you: It's all going to have to change. We chant that every day, every day, "I will grow different, separate

from all that is dear and appealing to me.” And we’re not just waiting until the end of life for that to happen. Things keep sloughing away. Even your own body keeps saying goodbye, goodbye, every day. This part goes, that part goes.

So what do you want to hold on to? You want to hold on to something better. You hold on to something that’s not going to make you struggle and do unskillful things in order to maintain this body here, or what you’ve got in terms of your material wealth. The world may change in very strange ways, but you don’t want your virtues or your principles to change. You hold on to those because they’ll lead you to a long-term welfare and happiness, much longer than the material things you have, much longer than even your body or your family can do for you.

This is your real refuge inside, so try to make sure that this refuge is strong. If you don’t have this refuge, then you just grab at whatever comes your way, hold on to it, then when it feels threatened, you start fighting everybody off.

As the Buddha said, his vision of life—the vision that got him on the path to awakening—was seeing that the world was like a little stream of water, and there were all these fish in the water, fighting one another over that last little gulp of water, even though they were all going to die anyhow. It got him depressed. But then he realized that there must be a way out. And he found that the way out was to look into his own heart. That way, he was able to find the path that led to a happiness that doesn’t have to depend on the body, doesn’t have to depend on anything else around you at all, something found totally within. That’s where we find our true well-being. That’s where we find our true safety.

As long as we have that, we’re much less likely to do unskillful things to other people. That way, other people benefit from our finding a refuge, too. So you want to make sure that you make this refuge as solid as you can, because there really is no other safety in life.