

Applying Goodwill

August 15, 2017

Always start the day with thoughts of goodwill: goodwill for yourself, goodwill for others, reminding yourself that you're looking for a happiness that's totally blameless, that doesn't cause any harm to anybody.

A happiness like that has to be searched for very precisely, because a lot of our sensual pleasures in life depend on somebody's being oppressed someplace. So you want to turn around and look inside at your main motivation: goodwill plus heedfulness, realizing that your actions really do make a difference in the world both for yourself and for other people. So you want to be careful, again, to act in a way that doesn't cause any harm.

Goodwill is not just being well-intentioned toward other people. You also try to be skillful. Now, skillfulness requires that you look very carefully at what you're doing and the actual results that you're getting. As the Buddha told his son, if you see that you're causing any harm either to yourself or others, go talk it over with somebody else, someone who's further advanced on the path, so that you can get some good advice on how to avoid that harm. And also so that you're not ashamed about your mistakes. If you're ashamed about your mistakes, unwilling to tell other people, it gets to a point where you're not willing to tell yourself.

So it's the combination of goodwill and heedfulness that keeps us on the path. Think about that every day, whether you're here at the monastery or out in the world outside. You want these two thoughts to be prominent: goodwill for everybody, no exceptions. And then heedfulness in all your actions, with no exceptions. That way, your good intentions become skillful, and your skillful intentions become more skillful, as you get more and more sensitive to what you're actually doing and the results you're getting.

All of this can't help but have a good impact on the mind, because a lot of the meditation comes from being observant for yourself. The Buddha gives you general directions, the ajans give you their general directions, but it's up to you to figure out the details of how they're applied. That's something that can be taught as a general principle but in the actual use of your powers of observation, that's got to be your contribution.

It's like going to the doctor. I know some people who go to the doctor and they want a shot and they want a pill. In other words, they want their medicine or the doctor to do all the work. But a lot of times, your health depends on being careful about what you eat and what you do.

In other words, you have to bring your own ingenuity and powers of observation to the process of what works and what doesn't work. And it's using your own powers of observation that wisdom develops.

So all these good qualities start out with: goodwill and heedfulness. Put the two together and your growth in wisdom is going to be strong.