

Blessing Yourself

December 31, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Train the mind so that it stays with the breath. In other words, each time it feels tempted to go off, remind yourself that this is where you want to stay: You want to be with the breath coming in, with the breath going out, all the way in, all the way out.

Try not to let your thoughts wander away, or if they do wander, don't follow them. They'll wander away a bit, but if you don't follow them, they'll just end. It's when you chase after them that they take on even more reality and they pull you away. So try to stay right here with the breath.

As the Buddha said, it's through training the mind that we discover happiness. People come here for a happy new year, they come for blessings, and the monks are happy to give blessings. *Āyu, vanṇo, sukham, balam*: You've probably heard that many, many times. "Long life, beauty, happiness, strength." But if it were easy for people to get those things just by hearing a blessing, then we'd have people flocking here. Nobody else would have to do anything. But the monks are basically reminding you: These are good things to look for in life, but how do you look for them? That's the important issue. They depend on your actions.

You bless yourself with your actions: through your generosity, through your virtue, through your meditation, your training the mind. It's when the mind is well-trained that it's more under its own control. Then whatever good things happen in life, you don't turn them into something bad. When bad things happen, you can actually turn them into something good.

So you want to work on training the mind and look at the real causes for long life, happiness, beauty and strength.

Long life, of course, comes from not killing other beings, even little tiny beings, inconvenient beings. You try to figure out some way to live in this world where you don't have to kill others. When you're not shortening their lives, your life is not going to get shortened.

The Buddha also says that you extend your life by meditating, developing the qualities of persistence and intentness, really liking to do the meditation as the mind gets settled down in a one object like this with a sense of ease. It's good for the body; it's good for the mind. So work on both the inner and the outer causes for long life.

As for beauty, the Buddha says that beauty comes from not showing your anger. This doesn't mean bottling it up. It means that when you get angry, you have to breathe through the sense of tension in the body. This is where another one of the skills of meditation comes in handy: When the breath is uncomfortable, you learn how to make it comfortable. Where there's tension in the body, you breathe through the tension.

When that side of the anger has been taken care of, then you can look at what the mind is actually telling you. You can figure out: Is it telling you something true or something false when it says you're angry at somebody else? And what's the best thing to do right now?

2:51 When the breath feels uncomfortable, you feel you've got to get something out of your system, and all too often what you get out of your system is not the kind of stuff you'd want to keep around. But then it's going to come back at you. So you figure out how to breathe through the tension.

Then look carefully at what you're angry about. What would be the best way of dealing with this situation that you don't like? Is it that you don't like it simply because of your likes? Or is there a good reason? If there's a good reason, how can you fix the situation in a way that's really effective, and not just being a slave to your moods? How do you speak to the other person in a way that shows respect?

When you can do this, the Buddha said that this is a cause for beauty. After all, you look at people when they're angry: They're not good-looking at all. It becomes part of a habit that carries on not just for that moment. So if you're looking for beauty, learn how to control your anger.

As for happiness, learn how to spread goodwill to others, even people you don't like, because you want to make sure that your own actions are not unskillful. If all you can think about is how much you want somebody else to suffer, it's very easy to act on that wish—and then, of course, that becomes an unskillful action on your part. So you say, "May all beings be happy. May they understand the causes for true happiness and be able to act on them." That's something you can wish for anybody, even people you intensely dislike, even for people who've been really misbehaving. You're basically wishing that they will see the light and change their ways, and you'll be happy to help them. Of course, you have to be very careful in how you do that. But still the fact that you wish happiness for others is a cause for your own happiness.

And then finally, strength. Strength comes from sharing what you've got. If you eat everything alone and don't share with other people, you get just the strength of that one meal and that's it. But if you share with other people, then they're happy to help you and they become part of your strength. You give strength to others by giving them food, giving them shelter, giving them things that they need that you have but they don't. That strength then becomes yours.

So if you're looking for a good blessing for the new year, think about these things. Learn how to abstain from harming others, how to keep your anger under control, how to have goodwill for others, and how to be generous. In this way, you bless yourself with your actions every day of the year.