

Wanting Harmless Happiness

July 12, 2018

Close your eyes, watch your breath. Make sure the breath is comfortable as it comes in, as it goes out.

This is a way of showing goodwill for yourself. We breathe all the time, and yet if we don't pay attention to it, the breath can get very uncomfortable as we're paying attention to other things. That way, we create some unnecessary discomfort for ourselves.

This is one of the Buddha's main lessons: that the unnecessary suffering we create for ourselves is what weighs the mind down. When the breath is uncomfortable, it puts you in a bad mood. When you're in a bad mood, you start thinking thoughts that are not all that skillful.

So turn around and do a little something that can be good for your mind. In this way you're showing goodwill for others, too. We think about the happiness that comes from the path, and it's a happiness that doesn't create boundaries. You can look around you right now. We have people from lots of different countries, lots of different backgrounds. It's because the Buddha's teaching is for everybody. The problem of suffering, the problem of the suffering that the mind creates for itself is not just an Asian problem or an American problem or a European or whatever. It's a human problem. It's a problem for the devas, it's a problem for animals, it's a problem for everybody. The Buddha was happy to share his teachings on how not to suffer with everybody who is able to understand.

So think about that, and keep remembering that the happiness you find here is totally harmless. The mind may want to go out and find other pleasures, but you have to think about the harm that those pleasures do. Your lust, your greed, your aversion, your delusion: These can create all kinds of problems around your search for happiness, and they can skew your vision of what real happiness is. People get so that they start justifying the harm they do to themselves, the harm they do to other people in the name of the happiness they want. You see this all around.

So the Buddha's offering a solution to this all-around problem. It's meant for everybody and it's going to be good for everybody. Not everybody may be able or willing to follow his teachings, but for those of us who are willing and are able, we can spread a good influence in the world both inside and outside.

So when you feel tempted to leave the practice, think about what you're going to do: creating more harm for yourself, more harm for other people. Whereas when you're practicing virtue, concentration, and discernment, when you're practicing generosity as well, you're finding happiness that enables us all to get along. So you don't see any need to harm anybody else in order to get what you want. We're learning to change what we want because we realize

that what we wanted in the past that was harmful is harmful not only for other people but also for ourselves. A happiness that's totally harmless: That's the best there is. And this is what the Buddha's offering.

So when you think thoughts of goodwill, remind yourself, how do you express goodwill? You express goodwill through the practice. When you observe the precepts, you're helping yourself. When you get others to observe the precepts, you're helping them. You're setting a good example. So it's through doing the practice that we show our goodwill for the world and all beings all around us, including this being sitting right here.