

A Day of Gratitude

November 22, 2018

Close your eyes and watch your breath. All the way in, all the way out. Try to stay right here, be steady.

All the goodness in the world comes from steadiness. Or steadiness is an important aspect of goodness. We like to be happy all the time, which means that we have to create the causes for happiness all the time. And they start in here: They start with a trained mind. So train your mind to stay here. Any other thoughts that come through the mind right now, you can let them go. Show the mind that you mean business, that you really do want to develop good qualities of mind, the qualities by which you protect yourself: things like mindfulness, alertness, and ardency, if which you try to do this really well. These are the qualities that help us build goodness in all aspects of our lives. If they're weak with the breath, it's going to be hard to develop them in other areas. The breath is right here all the time, so try to be with the breath all the time. The mind will have a place to settle down and gain some strength.

We know this skill because people have passed it along ever since the time of the Buddha. That makes you stop and think: How many people are we indebted to? The person who discovered these teachings, the people who've passed them on. Without them, would we think about looking at our breath, studying our breath? Probably not. It's because of the goodness of past people that we have the opportunity to build goodness today. So we should have some gratitude for them.

Today's Thanksgiving, a day of gratitude. And depending on where you believe your gratitude should be directed, it's a good thing to show gratitude to those who've done you good, because doing good for other people is not always easy. Think of all the sacrifices your parents went through, all the sacrifices your teachers went through, and the sacrifices of other people who've done you good in the past. It's not always easy. Think about that, and realize that they had the choice *not* to be helpful, but they chose to help you. Even if they didn't know you personally, the people of past generations who knew they had something good they wanted to pass it on for the succeeding generations: Those are people we should be grateful for, too.

So how do you show your gratitude? If the people who helped you are alive, you try to help them. If they're not alive, then you try to pass on the goodness—in other words, you develop the good inside you and you pass it on.

As Ajaan Lee said, the teachings on how to practice virtue, concentration, and discernment are like a recipe for a medicine. If you've never taken the medicine, you don't know how good it is, so the recipe just sits there. If nobody pays any attention to it, after a while people say, "Well, this is just old trash, old pieces of paper." You throw it away, burn it, and it gets lost. But if you've taken the medicine and you've realized that this is really good for you,

that it really did cure the disease, then you want to make sure that the recipe gets protected, doesn't get lost, and you can pass it on to other people.

So to really understand how good the goodness of people in the past has been, you try to follow their instructions for how goodness is built inside. When you see that this is immediately good for you, then you want to make sure it gets passed on to people behind you.

This is how goodness gets maintained in the world. We follow the instructions what we've learned from the past, we see that they're good, and we want to make sure they get passed on. This is one of the ways in which we show our gratitude for all the goodness that people in the past have done for us. You have to remember that when you're born into this world, it's not as if you discovered language on your own or discovered the world on your own. There are other people who had to help you. So appreciate that help. When you appreciate the help, you're much more likely to pass it on.