

Giving to the Meditation

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A recurring theme in the Buddha's teachings is that everything you need for happiness, for true happiness, you already have. It's simply a matter of developing it. The word for meditation, *bhavana*, literally means development. You take what you've got, and nourish it so that it grows.

So it's good to take stock at the beginning of the meditation: What are you bringing to the meditation? You may be bringing a day full of scattered thoughts, worries about this, that, the other thing, and as you focus on the negative things you're bringing to the meditation it makes it difficult. Focus on the positive things: You've got a body; you've got the breath; you've got a certain amount of mindfulness, a certain amount of alertness. If you didn't have these things you'd be dead or crazy. So you've got the raw materials you need. So remind yourself everything you need is right here. It's simply a matter of bringing it all together and putting some effort into it to keep them together.

Your willingness to give the effort is important, because along with the Buddha's teaching on the fact that you already have what you need for happiness, you find the very basic role he gives to generosity—to the act of giving. His explanation of right view on the mundane level starts with giving, that giving really is a good thing. It's a virtue. When he was going to teach people about the Four Noble Truths he would start out by talking about giving and then work his way up from there.

When you think about giving, you realize it's what you're bringing into any particular situation. If it's a relationship with another person, what you give that other person—that's what you bring into the situation. It reminds you that you have more than enough. If you constantly focus on what you lack, it's like you're burning a hole in your mind, and that hole has teeth. You're constantly wanting to gobble this down, gobble that down. But if you focus on what you've got that you're able to give, it creates a very different attitude for you to bring to the meditation. A person who's able to give is a person who's already in a position of wealth, even if it's a little tiny thing that you have to give: You have more than enough; you can share.

And the same with the meditation. When you sit here and meditate it's not simply a matter of sitting here and waiting for the show to begin or for someone to come and entertain you. It's a matter of your putting yourself into the meditation, giving yourself to the meditation: That's going to make all the difference. You find sometimes when you sit down that you put a little effort into it and the results are right there. Other times, though, it's going to take quite a while before you even notice the results. It's not the fact that the results are not there, but often other things are getting in the way so you don't see them.

So, trust in the process, and *give yourself* to the process. Be aware of the breath. Keep reminding yourself to stay with the breath. That act of mindfulness is important: Every time you breathe in, every time you breathe out remind yourself, "This is where you want to be; this is where you want to stay." And if you find that you've forgotten, that you've wandered off someplace else, well, remind yourself again.

And then come back and be as alert to the breath as possible: How does it feel? Where do you feel the breath? Try to put aside whatever notions you have about how the breath *should* feel or *where* you should feel the breath, and try to be sensitive to how you actually feel. Where are the sensations that let you know now the breath is coming in, now the breath is

going out? And what's the quality of those sensations? Is it comfortable? Are you putting pressure on it? If you are, step back a little bit. Allow the sensations to have a fullness of their own without your having to squeeze them in a particular direction. Think of all the cells in your body as being full, and then notice how the process of breathing changes as you think of the body in different ways.

If you bring an attitude of wealth to the meditation, an attitude of contentment to the meditation, you find it a lot easier to put up with the problems that you're going to encounter: the fact that you're going to forget and wander off and think about what you were doing last night or what you're planning to do tomorrow or whatever. When that happens, you can just bring yourself right back. And because you're not desperate and because you're not feeling impoverished you don't have to browbeat yourself over it. Just come back and pick up the job, pick up the work and keep with it.

And you're also in a much better position to notice what's going on. The insights people have in the course of their meditation when they're feeling desperate are not especially reliable insights. You're grasping at *whatever* comes your way: Whatever seems to make sense, whatever seems to work right now in the split second—you grasp at it. But there's no guarantee that the insight's going to be trustworthy or reliable. It's much more reliable when you come to it with a sense of well being and you notice, "Oh, I'm adding this unnecessary stress here. I'm creating this unnecessary problem." When you see that it's unnecessary, when you see that it's a problem, you can let it go because you have that sense of well being with which to compare.

So always try to bring an attitude of generosity, an attitude of wealth, an attitude of well being to the meditation. We talk about meditating to gain a sense of well being, but it's like investing in a business: You're not going to get any profit unless you have something to invest. And remind yourself you *do have* what you need: You've got the breath. You've got a mind. You've got these qualities of mindfulness, alertness, concentration, discernment. They're all there in an inchoate form. You've got the seeds for these things. The meditation is simply an opportunity to allow them to grow and to flourish, so that the seeds of well being that you already have will have the opportunity to show exactly how far they can go.

So try to be conscious of that wealth that you're bringing to the meditation, because that's what we're trying to develop. It's not that concentration will appear out of nothing, or well being will appear out of nothing. It comes from learning how to tend to the seeds, how to tend to the little sprouts you already have. So be willing to give of the effort that's required, and ultimately you'll find that the results are more than worth the effort.