

## *Taking Stock*

*July 6, 2011*

Okay, after all these many days of activity, try to find a quiet spot in your mind. Put everything else aside and just be with the breath. That's it: awareness and breath.

As for the thoughts that may be buzzing around in the mind, just let them buzz away. You don't have to chase them down; you don't have to do anything to them. Just don't get involved with them, that's all.

After someone has died, this is usually the hardest part. All the activity of the funeral is done, the cremation's done, the ashes are there in the boxes. Now it's time to turn inward, to gain a sense of inner nourishment, to remind yourself that you do have these sources of nourishment inside. Otherwise, there's a great feeling of emptiness. There's a big hole in your life where your father was or your husband was. You've got to learn how to fill up that hole. And the best way to do that is to remind yourself that the resources for happiness inside are still there. Those haven't been taken away. Just learn how to get back in touch with them.

It's amazing how little the mind actually needs. We depend on others for an awful lot. Our parents bring us into the world, they show us the world, they explain the world to us. They teach us how to speak, teach us how to walk, teach us how to have a sense of what's right, what's wrong, what's important and what's not. The whole reason they do this, of course, is so that we'll be able to depend on ourselves, because they know that they won't be there for us forever.

You've known that fact for a long time, too. But there's a difference between knowing about it in the abstract and then actually experiencing it.

So now you want to take stock of what good things you still have inside that you learned from your parents. This applies to all of us, whether our parents are still there or not. Learn how to develop those resources. That's their gift, and you want to make good use of it. You don't want to just throw it away.

Look at what you've got inside. At the very least, you have the desire for a happiness that really is reliable. And part of a reliable happiness, as you've learned, is one that doesn't have to oppress anyone else, doesn't have to take anything away from anyone else. You've got those resources inside, too. You've got the potential for virtue, concentration, discernment. It's simply a question of learning to develop these potentials.

Of course, you'll find, as you look in your mind, there are a lot of other potentials as well, a lot of less skillful potentials. You've probably had some

practice in developing those, too. But it's important that you realize you do have the choice: You don't have to just go with old habits, good or bad. You want to choose: Which ones do you really want to develop?

This is why in the past there'd be a long period of mourning, when the family would go into itself. Nowadays, we don't have that. But you do need time to go into yourself, to get in touch, to figure out what's still of value and what you want to develop now.

So, stop and take stock. Being with the breath is a good place to do this, because it's a really intimate place inside. It gets you in touch not only with your mind but also with what's going on in the body. Here in the West, we have a huge problem with this. Most of us seem to be living in our heads, and the body's just kind of an appendage. We don't really take care of the potentials that it has to offer. We've got all these elements in the body: earth, water, wind, fire, space. And a lot of the well-being of the mind depends on our looking after these things, too.

We had that chant just now about how form—one of the forms in our life, of course, is the form of the body—feelings, perceptions, fabrications, consciousness: All these things are not-self. They don't really lie totally under your control. But it's not as if you don't have any control over them at all. You do have some. So you want to take advantage of that.

Realize that all of these aggregates play a part in the path. You're sitting here focusing on the breath: That's form. You breathe in ways that give rise to a sense of ease, fullness, pleasure, refreshment: That's feeling. You hold the perception of breath energy in mind and look for the sensations that correspond to that. You evaluate how things are going and make adjustments as necessary; That's fabrication. And then you're conscious of all these things. That's right concentration, and it's also all the five aggregates being brought together in a way that develops your skillful potentials. It provides a home for the mind.

Often you hear that the Buddha's teachings have a very negative take on the body. But that's seeing only part of the Buddha's teachings. He has a very positive take on the body as well. After all, you breathe in a way that gives rise to a sense of ease and fullness and you allow that ease and fullness to saturate the body. That's part of caring for this potential you've got, caring for this gift that you've got from your parents, putting it to good use: using it as a foundation for the mind to really settle down. Don't be too quick to throw it away.

Someone once came to Ajaan Lee complaining he'd had a problem: A couple of his friends were making fun of him for being a Buddhist. "We hear this body of yours is not-self. Well, why won't you let us hit it?" He didn't know how to answer them. So he went to see Ajaan Lee, and Ajaan Lee said to tell them, "Look, I

borrowed this. They're borrowed goods. I have to take good care of them. When I return them, I want to return them in good shape." So you do look after the body. It's part of your vehicle here for following the path.

As you give rise to a sense of well-being inside, a lot of the hardness in the mind begins to soften up. All the walls inside the mind—the areas where you're in denial about this, that, and the other thing—begin to soften up as well. Your resentments about other people, those get to soften up too. As a sense of real well-being fills the whole body, the resentments you have of other people, the parts of your mind that you don't want to admit are there: It's a lot easier to give up the resentment, it's a lot easier to pull down those walls of denial. Then you're in a much better position to express goodwill for yourself, express goodwill for others.

In this way, as you focus on the breath, it's not just developing a potential for your own, personal, individual happiness, but you're also developing the kind of happiness that spreads around. This happiness that spreads around is what makes human life worthwhile. We are, after all, social animals, and we do depend on one another.

This is why it's good to focus on the type of happiness that doesn't create sharp boundaries. The happiness that's based on gaining wealth, gaining status, gaining praise, having pleasurable sensations coming in by the senses: That kind of happiness creates boundaries, because what you gain, someone else has to lose. Or what they gain, you have to lose. We're all involved in feeding, and there's a struggle over our food sources. What I feed on, you can't feed on, and vice versa. This refers not only to physical food but also to emotional and mental food as well. So here we are in a quandary. On the one hand, we do depend on one another and on the other hand we do have these individual bodies that have their individual needs.

This is why it's good to work on the kind of happiness that erases those boundaries: the kind of happiness where everybody benefits, the happiness that comes from generosity, from virtue, and from training the mind. This is the kind of happiness where you still feel a connection, not only with the people around you right now but also with people who've helped you in the past, and the people who helped them, and the people who helped them. It goes on for a long, long chain of people.

So try to work on the happiness that doesn't keep you confined in boundaries. You want a happiness that really does nourish deep parts of the heart. These are the kinds of happiness that help to fill up that sense of emptiness when someone has gone. You realize that in these there still is a sense of connection. And it's not just a sentimental connection. There's a definite sense of cause and effect. Without

that other person, you might not have learned these things. You've got something good here inside that you want to nurture, you want to look after so that you can pass it on to others. You benefit from it and you can pass it on to others so they can benefit as well. And you dedicate the merit to those who inspired you to do this.

So these are some of the ways that help fill up the emptiness. Now that all the activity has died down, you have to turn inside. Take stock, breathe in a way that's healing, think in a way that's healing, and live in a way that does honor to the people you miss, the people who've helped you—and that does honor to your own desire for true happiness. That is one area where ultimately each of us is responsible. Fortunately, as you're looking after your own true happiness, you're not harming anybody, you're actually helping them.

The Buddha has the image of acrobats standing on the end of a bamboo pole set vertically. One acrobat is standing on the shoulders of another one. The acrobat below says, "Okay, you look after me and I'll look after you, and that way we'll be able to perform our tricks and get down safely from this bamboo pole." And the one on top says, "No. That won't do. I'll look after myself, you look after yourself, and that way we help each other to come down safely." When you maintain your balance, it makes it a lot easier for others to maintain theirs.

This is another way in which the happiness that comes from virtue, generosity, meditation, spreads its benefits all around. So keep these activities at the center of everything else you do.