

Happiness Comes from Inner Strength

October 19, 2011

There are basically two kinds of happiness: a happiness that comes from the things we gain or take from outside, and the happiness that comes from developing our inner resources.

The first kind of happiness is very undependable, because often there's very little outside for us to take. And the taking often develops qualities of mind that are really uncomfortable, especially if we see that when we take something, somebody else has to lose.

This is why the Buddha recommended the second kind of happiness, the happiness that comes from developing our inner resources.

You may ask yourself, "What kind of resources do you have?" There's more there than you might think. That's one of the major discoveries of the practice: that you really do have more potential than you imagine.

This is one of the reasons why we listen to the Buddha's teachings: to stretch our imagination, to help us understand that we have more energy inside, more potentials inside than we would have thought otherwise.

There are three main ways of developing these potentials: through generosity, virtue, and fostering thoughts of universal goodwill. In each case, we find that we have to take something we have inside and develop it further. In doing so, we gain inner strength. That inner strength, that sense that we can depend on ourselves and we have something inside that we didn't have to take from anyone else but it's there: That creates a great sense of well-being.

These are areas in life where we can develop these inner resources as part of augmenting our meditation, because the meditation is going to take this principle and carry it really far. In the beginning, we require these three kinds of training: training in generosity, in virtue, and in developing goodwill.

With generosity, it's a matter of realizing that we have more than enough. The mind-state that says, "I don't have enough. I need to take something from outside": That's creating hunger right there, weakness right there. And that, in and of itself, causes stress and suffering.

But when you realize that you have more than enough in certain areas, and that there are other people who might benefit from your sharing it with them: That creates a sense of wealth. It's a sense of wealth that even poor people can have—because generosity is not just a matter of giving material things. You can make a gift of your knowledge, a gift of your time, a gift of your forgiveness—in other

words, making up your mind that you're not going to look for revenge for the things that people have done to wrong you. In each case, as you make this gift, you're placing yourself on a higher level. You have more than enough. You have the strengths inside that allow you to do without certain things or do without thoughts of revenge or do without being stingy. You have knowledge that you can share.

One of the nice things about this way of finding happiness is that instead of creating boundaries—which happens when you look for your happiness in acquiring material gain or status—this kind of happiness erases boundaries. You see that that person benefits, you benefit, and the more they're happy about it, the happier you feel as well. This creates a really good feeling in the mind. You find that you can feed on that feeling and it gives you strength.

Virtue is also a kind of gift. You realize that you can restrain your less skillful impulses. You can refrain from harming other people. You give them safety, and in giving them safety, as the Buddha says, you gain a share in that safety as well. You create a world around you in which there's less harm being done. You create a world in which truthful words are being spoken, where people act in honest, reliable ways. Even if it's only you acting in a reliable way, even if you're the only person speaking the truth, at least you're creating a new atmosphere around yourself, a new environment around yourself.

And you find you attract a different kind of person. If you've been living with people who lie a lot, you find that they don't like being around you anymore when you're telling the truth. People who tell the truth will be more attracted to you.

You begin to realize that the environment around you comes from within you to a huge extent. All too often, we allow ourselves to be the victim of outside circumstances. But again, that's weakening yourself and creates a vicious cycle.

Yet if you can find the strength to refrain from harming others—and it does take a certain amount of restraint and forbearance, endurance—you discover that in exercising those strengths, they become more and more reliable.

The same principle applies with goodwill. There may be a lot of people out there who wish you ill, but it's not going to help the world for you to wish them ill in return. We can't wait for everybody to be loving and benevolent with one another before we're willing to be loving and benevolent with them. If everybody's waiting for everybody else, it's never going to happen.

But if you can look within yourself and see that there's a part of your mind that really flourishes when you're wishing for the true happiness of others and for your own true happiness, you realize that you gain strength. You've got a source of energy in here that you can develop. If you start feeling ill will, that just damages

that strength. And again, it creates a really nasty vicious cycle.

So you decide that, regardless of what other people say to you or do to you, you're not going to let that color your attitude. You wish everybody to be happy. You maintain that attitude. That doesn't mean you have to like other people or go along with whatever they say. It simply means that you're happy when you see the happiness of others.

That's one of the ways in which your inner strength gets developed: You learn how to feed off of other people's happiness in a healthy way. You're not taking their happiness away. You're augmenting their happiness and, as you do that, you gain greater happiness as well.

You're the opposite of that anger-eating demon that appears in one of the suttas, where the more the devas get upset with it, the bigger and stronger it gets. Sakka, the king of the devas, realizes what this is: It's an anger-eating demon. So he goes and he pays respect to it. The more he bows down and shows respect, the more the anger-eating demon just shrivels up, shrivels up, until it finally disappears.

The same principle applies in our lives. If we feel a lot of ill will for other people, that feeds the ill will in them, and things just get worse and worse. So even though they may be showing ill will to you, that doesn't mean that you have to respond in kind. You look for the strength of goodwill within yourself and you find that it'll change the situation. At the very least, you know that you haven't behaved in a way that's unskillful, you haven't behaved in a way that's harmful.

And the goodwill itself is one of the strengths that enables your generosity and your virtue to continue developing even further. All three of these ways of finding inner strength, finding happiness within, are mutually reinforcing.

When you allow yourself to stretch your imagination to realize you have these sources of strength within you, even when it seems like they're not to be found: Just work on the assumption that they're there. That opens the possibility for them to show themselves and to grow.

In doing this, you create a sense of well-being, a sense of fullness and wealth. You know you're not hungering for people's approval or for people's things or to get back at people, because that kind of hunger leads you to feed on all kinds of unhealthy food that makes you even weaker. And just the fact of being hungry, in and of itself, the Buddha said, is the greatest disease, the worst disease, because it's constant.

But you can stop making yourself hungry. You've got sources of strength within and you can express them. Sometimes you have to express them outside before you feel them inside, but when you develop this habit of being generous,

being virtuous in the sense of refraining from harming other people, and learning to think thoughts of goodwill, it'll call up the strength you need.

So instead of finding happiness from being hungry and then trying to take something and stuff it into that big hole of your hunger, you find a happiness in being strong, even when you look around and there doesn't seem to be any strength around. Act on the assumption that it's there, and you can call it into being.

This is a happiness that comes from fullness, a happiness that comes from a sense of wealth. When you begin to understand this dynamic of happiness, it really reinforces your meditation.

Several of the Thai ajaans have said that when you reach the end of the path, you look back and you realize that it was the same practice all the way through: the attitude that starts with generosity, looking inside yourself to find the strengths you might not have noticed at first, and being willing to share them.

That's the basic dynamic of the whole path.