

## *Right Resolve, Right Concentration*

*September 1, 2012*

Every time you make up your mind you're going to meditate, it's a form of right resolve. You're looking for a happiness that's not dependent on sensuality, not dependent on ill will.

There *are* forms of happiness dependent on ill will, when you like to think about all the exquisite pain your enemy is going to go through. But here you decide to give that happiness up. Any happiness based on harmfulness: You're going to give that up, too.

You're looking for a happiness that's innocent, a happiness that doesn't create any harm for anybody. Just having that thought is a good thought. Of course, you then want to carry through with it.

There are two ways you can do this. One is to focus on thoughts of goodwill as a topic of your meditation. You wish for your own happiness; you wish for the happiness of others. True happiness.

Because the principle of karma is that no one's going to find happiness unless they learn how to act skilfully. When you wish for people's happiness or the happiness of animals, or whatever, you're hoping that they can understand the causes for true happiness and then act on them. In other words, you hope that they develop right view and right resolve as well.

Now, that kind of thought should be easy to think. It's not like you're hoping that people who are evil will suddenly be happy as they're doing evil or regardless of what their actions are. You're hoping that they'll see that what they're doing is wrong and then give it up.

As for the question of whether anyone's actually going to do that: The simple thought in your head is not going to have that kind of impact. But you want to make sure that your motivation is right.

Because this is an important part both of discernment and concentration. The discernment lies in realizing that your actions can lead to suffering and so you want to make sure you don't do anything that's going to lead to suffering. And you have to look at your motivation to protect yourself from unskillful actions.

So motivating yourself with thoughts of goodwill is a form of protection for yourself—another reason why it should be easy to think thoughts of goodwill.

As the Buddha said, goodwill is a good object for concentration. At the very least, it can get you into the first jhana. When you take that level of concentration and work with it, developing the factors of awakening around it, it forms the basis

for something even better: at the very least, a mind that's still and harmless. You can also take it as a foundation for gaining the noble attainments.

So that's one way in which you can use right resolve to get into concentration.

The other way is to look at your thoughts and see anywhere where you're engaging in thoughts of sensuality, thoughts of ill will, thoughts of harmfulness. Try to counteract them directly. Thoughts of sensuality: Think of all the harm that's done by getting fired up with sensual desire, all the stupid and thoughtless things you do. If you don't want to look at the stupid things you've done, look at the stupid things other people do under the power of sensual desire.

The same with ill will: When people have ill will, they get really blinded. They've got themselves on fire with the ill will, while the other person for whom they have ill will probably doesn't know anything about it. So who's suffering? The person with ill will.

You realize that if you allow yourself to think thoughts of ill will, they're going to come out in your actions at some point. You're missing an important protection, because the main danger in life doesn't come from outside. It comes from your own unskillful intentions. So you need the protection of goodwill.

As for thoughts of harmfulness, that's when you see somebody suffering and you want to make them suffer more. The same principle applies here. You're just creating more bad karma for yourself. So try to think in ways that will counteract those unskillful thoughts.

Try to think at the very least in ways that are not involved with sensuality, not involved with ill will, not involved with harmfulness. Then you can reflect on the fact that if you think in these skillful ways, you can think all day and it wouldn't cause you any harm, aside from the fact that thinking a lot wears you down. So the mind needs to rest.

And when you've been thinking skillful thoughts like that, it's easy to get the mind to settle down, much more so than if you've been thinking unskillful thoughts and you try to jump straight to concentration. Your mind is going to resist. It's got some unfinished business it's got to take care of first. So you take care of that business.

If you think about people at work who've been unfair to you and you're all worked up about that, try to remind yourself: This is the human condition.

The Buddha gives lots of ways of counteracting ill will. One is that this is normal on the human realm. If you want to live in a place where everybody is fair and well-intentioned, you're in the wrong place. And you're not the only one who's been the victim of unfair treatment.

So you decide not to get worked up about it. Not that you become a doormat

for other beings, but for the time being, at least, you let those thoughts go. The mind needs to rest. So first counteract the thoughts and then allow it to rest.

It's in this way that discernment can lead to concentration. You see the need for skillful intentions and so, on the one hand, you develop thoughts of goodwill as a way of protecting your intentions. And then on the other, you counteract other unskillful thoughts, like thoughts about sensuality: Think about the unattractiveness of the body. If you're desiring somebody's body, first take the skin off your body and see what it looks like inside. Then remind yourself that the other person's body is just like that.

One of the best ways of bringing the mind to concentration is by developing a sense of samvega, realizing that all the things that you've been pursuing come down to nothing much. The ways you've been pursuing happiness in one way or another, especially in sensuality, is just a lot of trouble. And your desires are totally insatiable.

As the Buddha said, even if it rained gold coins, we wouldn't have enough for one person's sensual desires. There's no fulfilment to be found that way. So if you can develop a sense of samvega for those kind of thoughts, it makes it a lot easier for the mind to settle down.

Then you can bring it to the breath. You know that as soon as you leave the breath, you're going to go back to those same old pointless thoughts, so why go? One of the most effective ways of dealing with distraction is to develop that sense of samvega first as a way of bringing the mind down.

It's in these ways that right resolve connects with right concentration. All the factors of the path connect, they help one another along, but this connection is especially strong.

The Buddha points it out several times. He notes that when the mind finally is in right concentration, that's when you're totally free from unskillful resolves. And his definition of transcendent right resolve is the directed thinking and evaluation that bring the mind into concentration. So this is a particularly close connection here.

So if you find your mind wandering off, remember that you're wandering off into wrong resolve. Is that where you want to be? You're wandering into dangerous territory.

In the Canon they compare that to a monkey that leaves the monkey places in the forest and comes out to areas where there are both human beings and monkeys. In areas like that, of course, human beings are coming to hunt the monkeys. It's easy to get trapped when you're there.

It's the same way when your mind wanders off into thoughts of sensuality or

thoughts of ill will or thoughts of harmfulness: You're in dangerous territory.

So come back in here where it's safe, right where you're here with the breath. Simply the thought of coming back is as form of right resolve, too. Even better is when you carry it through, when you stay here.

So there's a very close connection between the discernment factors and the concentration factors.

Even though, when the mind is very still like this, it doesn't seem to be doing anything, don't think that it's not doing anything. At the very least, it's in staying in safe territory. When it really settles in here, it has a chance to see the safe territory even more clearly.

So allow the mind to settle in. Don't be afraid that you're missing out on anything outside. The things that you really need to know are all going to appear right here, so you want to stay here. You can't tell when they're going to come, so you have to be here continually if you want to see them.

It's like going out to hunt a rabbit. You know the place where rabbits tend to go, so you go there. You have to sit there very quietly but be very alert. But you can't make an appointment with the rabbits. You just know that this is a place they're likely to come and then you sit there. When they come, then you'll be able to get the rabbit.

It's the same with discernment and concentration. The simple fact that you're bringing the mind out of its unskillful ways and into concentration: That's already the beginning of discernment.

Then, as you sit here alert and quiet, you're primed to see even more subtle discernments when they appear.