

Wisdom, Compassion, Purity

June 26, 2017

Goodwill for all beings. We want to look for a happiness in a way that allows us to have goodwill for everyone, a happiness that doesn't take anything away from anyone else. Otherwise, our goodwill is hypocritical.

This is something really special about the path that the Buddha taught. He saw that we have the potentials within us to find a happiness inside that's better than anything available outside. He gave his life to trying to find this happiness, even though when he set out, it wasn't a certain thing. It was just a possibility with no confirmation. We were talking today about imagination. He was able to imagine a deathless happiness that could be found within. The question simply was: how to find it. What was the path? And it's good to have a sense of awe around his discovery, because it's bigger than anything you can imagine.

But it starts with small steps, the path to that happiness. There's virtue: the holding to the precepts. Concentration: getting the mind to be still; having it centered with a sense of well-being. And then discernment: being able to use that concentration to see what's going on in the mind—where you're causing yourself unnecessary suffering; what you're doing that's getting in the way of finding the happiness whose potential lies within.

The Buddha wasn't operating from the position that we're all basically good or that we're all basically bad. As you notice—as anybody would notice, looking in your mind—the mind is a mixture of both. So what he was relying on was not innate goodness, but our innate desire for well-being. This is what keeps us going.

Biologists talk about the drive to survive. Well, what do we survive for, if not for happiness? People who feel that they can find no happiness at all in life have no desire to keep on living. Happiness is what we live for. So it's simply a matter of learning to take this drive for happiness and learning how to follow it wisely. The Buddha didn't say to be embarrassed of our desire for happiness. In fact, that's what he's assuming as underlying every act that we do. He's simply saying, "Learn how to do it wisely."

So this is why we're meditating here. It's part of the wisdom. Wisdom, he said, starts with the question, "What when I do it will lead to long term welfare and happiness?" The wisdom there lies in seeing that your actions are going to make the difference, and that you want long-term, you don't want short-term.

Based on that principle is compassion. You realize that just as you want happiness, everybody else wants happiness. And if your happiness depends on

their harm and suffering, it's not going to last. So you have to take their happiness into consideration as well.

And there's the principle of purity: that your actions really do follow along with the principles of wisdom and compassion. To do this, the Buddha said, you have to examine your intentions every time you say something or do something or think something: What do you expect is going to come about as a result? If you expect any harm, you don't do it. If you don't expect any harm, go ahead and do it. But while you're doing it, check to see what the actual results are, because sometimes you can have good intentions but they can be misinformed. They can be deluded.

So you look for the immediate consequences. If they seem okay, you can continue. If not, you can stop. Then, when the action is done, you look at the long-term consequences as well. If you see that no harm was apparent right away, but there was long-term harm, then you resolve not to repeat that mistake. Go and talk it over with someone else who's on the path. Get some other wisdom to apply to this. But if there was no harm, then you can take joy in the fact that your practice is developing.

That attitude of joy is important. You want to be able to find a sense of well-being simply in the knowledge that you've done something skillful, because that's going to be a lot of your energy on the path.

The other part of the energy, of course, is getting the mind in concentration. It enables you to see your actions a lot more clearly and it puts you in a position of well-being so that you're not so 100% inclined to side with yourself all the time. You're in a better position to see when you actually do harm and when you don't.

In this way, the pursuit of happiness actually develops qualities of wisdom, compassion, and purity. These are the attributes that are credited to the Buddha himself. And, as he said, he developed them not because he was a god or because he was someone special. He was special in the sense that he took these potentials that all of us have and then he developed them to see how far they could go. And he found that they could go very far.

So we have him as an example that true happiness can be found within, and it can be found in an honorable way.