

Samvega First

February 27, 2018

It's a common pattern that when you clear out some time to meditate, sit down, make up your mind you're going to stay with the breath, there's a part of the mind that sees this time as an opportunity to think about all kinds of other things. So you've got to nip that tendency in the bud.

That's one of the reasons why we have chants before the meditation, to get your mind in the right frame. Particularly the chants on goodwill and equanimity: To fend off any thoughts of people who have wronged you in the past, or people you've wronged, things that you'd like to go back and change but you can't, you try to develop thoughts of goodwill and equanimity beforehand.. You remind yourself, "Well, I'm trying to have goodwill for everyone, trying to be equanimous about the things I can't change." That gives you some tools to use with the thoughts that come up.

Ajaan Lee also recommends that you start out with contemplations that give rise to a sense of *samvega*, so that when the desires for doing this, doing that, seeing this, whatever, come up, you can remind yourself, "Where do those things go? They go to suffering." Even if we attained the things we wanted, that wouldn't put an end to craving. Craving ends only when you have dispassion. And there's always going to be suffering that follows on the craving.

That was one of the Buddha's main discoveries, that any craving that leads to becoming is going to entail suffering. Becoming is a process that happens in the mind all the time. You have a world appearing in your imagination. Sometimes the desire comes first and sometimes the world appears and you focus on something in that world that you want to desire. But in order to attain that desire, you have to take on an identity in that world. This happens in the thought worlds of the mind, and it happens on the large scale as well.

This is why we're human beings. When we left our last life, something in the mind said, "I want something in the human world." And whether it was a conscious decision or just something that welled up in the mind and then swept you along, here you are. Think about these desires for which you have to take on a human body. The human body has its advantages—we can gain all kinds of things because we have a human body—but it brings a lot of suffering in its wake. Aging, illness, death; these things happen all over the world.

I was in Brazil recently and happened to visit a faith healer. Thousands of people were coming to see this man, all with their stories of illness, either their

own illnesses or the illnesses of people in their family. You get this human body, you think you've got it as a tool for gaining your desires, and then it turns on you. And so much of our lives is devoted to looking after the body: to slow down the aging, to prevent the illness, to slow down the death. The things we do sometimes work, up to a point, but then finally there's no escape. Aging, illness, and death will have to come, and then the mind, because it can no longer depend on the body, will have nothing to depend on but this river of craving that keeps flowing and flowing and flowing, sweeping you on to something else.

The Buddha's image for this is of a stick being thrown up in the air. Sometimes it lands on this end, sometimes it lands on that end, sometimes it lands splat in the middle. There's no clear pattern. It's not like we're all learning lessons in this life that move us up to the next level next time and then, from that point, ever and ever upward. The course of our lives goes up and down, up and down. We gain some happiness, then we get attached to it. It's almost like the cosmos is playing a trick on us. We gain rewards for doing things skillfully, but then if we get attached to the rewards they pull us down.

If you think about this and just stop there, it gets pretty depressing. But then you remind yourself that the Buddha found a way out that's not just a sour-grapes way out. He says that there is an ultimate happiness that we can find through our own efforts. And, fortunately, there's nobody to prevent us from trying to find it. Nobody in the cosmos has a bigger plan, saying, "This is where you've got to suffer for the sake of my bigger plan." Some of us would like to see a pattern or plan for the cosmos, but then we'd be a slave to whatever that plan was, and that would always entail suffering.

So we do have the freedom to decide that we want to follow this path to the end of suffering. It's a good path, developing good qualities of mind, and it leads to a good place. So after you've developed samvega, try to develop a sense of *pasada*, a sense of confidence that this is a good path to follow. That makes it a lot easier for the mind to settle down. Because you're not constantly wondering about, "What am I missing?" What you're missing is the process of becoming that leads someplace else, and leads eventually to more suffering.

So you've got a chance, you can take this body, these feelings, this mind, and put them together in a way that forms a path. We practice mindfulness of the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, the mind in and of itself, before these things turn into another becoming that leads outside.

It's like the keys on a computer keyboard. If you press a key together with the Control key, it changes into something else. If you just keep it as the key in and of itself, the A is an A, a B is a B. But if you press them together with Control, then

all of a sudden A is All, S is Save, Q is Quit. It goes off into some other place, some other realm.

So we're trying to keep things here with body, feelings, mind, right on the level of A is A and B is B. Body is body, feelings are just feelings. You don't think about where they're going, what they mean, or what else could be made out of them. Just notice, what is it like to experience the body? What is it like to have a feeling? And how can you focus on the breath, which is part of the body, in such a way that gives rise to a good feeling? Because if you want to get the mind into a state of concentration, it needs a sense of ease, of well-being to stay with. Otherwise it won't be able to resist the pull to go out and think about something else.

The same with the mind: Just look at mind states as mind states, and not in terms of where they could provide a desire and then a world for you where they turn into something else. Try to get to these things before you've hit the Control key. That way, you find that you can develop a sense of well-being, a sense of ease right here. Things can begin to relax in the body, the mind can begin to relax into the body instead of being ready to jump out all the time. It can meld back into the body because it feels good. The breath can feel good throughout the body. You've got the breath, which is body; feeling filling the body; the mind filling the body. That's what we're aiming for, putting all these things together. We do that by looking at body, feelings, and mind just in and of themselves.

Then, if things are out of balance, we try to remember: What did the Buddha teach to help bring things back into balance? And when they're in balance, what did he teach about maintaining that balance? These are the elements of concentration. They're the elements that otherwise we'd turn into states of becoming that would lead out someplace else. But here we're trying to catch them before they do that. You've got them on their own terms and you can turn them into a space where the mind can watch the process of becoming, to see that the causes of suffering really do come from inside. It's not as if someone out there is inflicting suffering on us. Even when people are inflicting pain on us, there's a skill that can be mastered in the mind so you don't have to suffer from the pain.

It all starts right here, so bring things back as close as possible to right here. And remind yourself: Anything that would flow out from this to go to the past or the future is looking for trouble. You can have a sense of satisfaction that you're in a good place. Have the confidence that this will be a good place, this will develop. The state of concentration is a form of becoming as well, but it's a form of becoming that can be part of the path.

So here we are, in a good place. And even though the path may seem long, it's better to be on this path than to be on other paths that wander around aimlessly,

not knowing where you're going. This path leads out. It leads to a genuine happiness that doesn't turn on you, a happiness that's true: That's one of the qualities of nibbana that the Buddha emphasized again and again. It doesn't change on you. It's not deceptive. It's not the sort of thing that looks good in the beginning and then turns on you, like so many other pleasures of the world. It's good all the way through. So try to get your mind in tune with that path. Because that's the only way any real satisfaction can be found.