

## *May You Forever Be Well*

*January 30, 2019*

“May you forever be well.” It’s a blessing we chant every morning, every evening. It’s an expression of goodwill. We don’t expect that simply saying the blessing will make everybody well, but it is an expression of our intention—that we would like to see everybody always well.

Now, if it’s going to happen, it’ll have to happen based on actions. The other chant we had just now goes through various actions that the Buddha said count as blessings or protections. You bless yourself, you protect yourself, by acting skillfully. You may not expect everything in life to go well, but you’ll be well, and that’s what matters.

One passage says that when the mind is touched by the ways of the world—the *lokadhamma*—it’s unshaken and serene: That’s the highest blessing. And what are the ways of the world? There’s gain, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure and pain. These things are part and parcel of the world. As long as we’re in the world, we’ll meet not only with the ones we like but also with the ones we don’t like. But the mind that is truly blessed is one that’s not shaken either by the good ones or the bad ones.

That requires skill, and this is what we’re trying to develop as we meditate: the skill so that the mind is not shaken. We’re working on the skills of concentration so that the mind can stay with one object with a sense of well-being, and issues of the world can be put off to the side. So wherever you go, you want to keep those skills of concentration in mind.

Work with the breath, trying to breathe in a way that feels good all the way down through the body, giving rise to a sense of ease, a sense of fullness, and then allowing that sense of ease and fullness to grow quiet and calm. You can even get the mind to the point where it’s so still that the breath grows quiet and still as well.

Now, with some of those skills, you have to sit very quietly to master them, but with some of the other skills you don’t. For instance, you can breathe comfortably in the midst of any situation, realizing that the breath doesn’t *have* to be uncomfortable. Nobody’s forcing you to breathe in an uncomfortable way. So why allow the body to breathe in an uncomfortable way? You have that option always: No matter what’s happening, you can breathe comfortably. It gives the mind a foundation. It’s a skill you can tap into at any time, wherever you are, wherever you go, whatever you’re doing. It helps give the mind a grounding.

The image in the Canon of a mind unshaken by the ways of the world is of a stone column sixteen spans tall, eight of those spans buried underground. So there you have a column of rock, a column of stone. The winds come no matter from what direction, and the column will not shake. What is that grounding deep inside the ground? Part of it is a mind that can focus inside and not get shaken by things outside.

So whatever skills you've learned as you sit here and meditate, try to figure out which ones you can take with you as you go through the day. And as for the skills that require that you sit very, very quietly: keep them in mind. Remember that you want to sit and meditate every day, to give the mind a chance to put all of its burdens down and just be with the body in the present moment with no other responsibilities, so it can get to know this territory well.

But that grounding for the column is not just the techniques of concentration. After all, concentration is based on right mindfulness, so you need mindfulness, too. And as the Buddha said, right mindfulness in turn is based on virtue and right view. Right view is what you should be mindful of. It tells you how to recognize what's coming up in the mind—whether it's skillful or unskillful. Then right mindfulness picks up from there, reminding you that, one, it's important to abandon the unskillful qualities and develop the skillful ones; and two, you've learned lessons in how to do that, so recall them and apply them. In this way, right view gives directions to the mindfulness and then right mindfulness is what keeps reminding you of those directions, so that you can know what to do to get the mind to settle down.

And as the Buddha said, part of right view is goodwill. There's a very interesting passage where he says that if you have ill-will for anyone, and you think it's a good thing, that's wrong view. So it's important that you be able to express your goodwill not only with thoughts of goodwill or with blessings, but also through virtue. You resolve that you don't want to harm anybody, and you follow the Buddha's guidelines on the kinds of action you want to avoid regardless of what the situation is.

But virtue's not just a matter of the precepts. It's also a matter of sense-restraint. In other words, you look at the way you're looking at things and listening to things, and so on with all the senses. Then you have to ask yourself, "Why? Why I am looking in this way? Why am I listening in this way?" Especially if you find that greed is doing the looking, or anger is doing the listening. You want to have wisdom doing the looking and listening instead.

So if there's something the mind is eager to have a desire for something. And this is what often happens: It's not the case that we're sitting around perfectly

neutral and then something comes and makes us feel desire or makes us feel anger. All too often, we're out looking for something to desire or for something to get angry about. So you want to be able to see that, to hold it in check.

And sense restraint also means not only looking at *why* you're looking but also at the results: When you look at things in a certain way, what happens? When you listen to things in a certain way, what happens? If it has a bad impact on the mind, well, try to look in a different way, listen in a different way, so that you're not stirring up more greed, aversion, and delusion.

So virtue and right view are the foundation for right mindfulness, and right mindfulness is the foundation for right concentration.

There's another passage where the Buddha talks about the different kinds of loss that we can suffer in life. There may be loss of relatives, loss of wealth, loss of our health. And the Buddha says that those kinds of loss are not serious. They're simply the results of past actions; they're one of the affairs of the world. Wherever we're born, there's going to be aging, illness, death, and separation. He says the loss that's serious is loss of virtue and loss of right view. If you lose right view, ill-will becomes something that's okay, careless actions become okay, and that leads in a downward spiral.

So these two qualities, virtue and right view: Regard them as treasures, treasures that you want to hold onto always. Because they can lead to other good qualities in the mind. And they protect you. They're part of that grounding for the stone column, so when the good and bad winds of the world come blowing, your mind is not shaken.

So hold these qualities dear, and may you be able to hold onto them forever, so that you can forever be well.