

## *Goodwill as Wealth*

*March 5, 2019*

Among the steps in the Buddha's instructions on breath meditation are the steps where he tells you to breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure, breathe in and out sensitive to rapture. You may ask yourself, "Well, where is the pleasure? Where is the rapture?" You have to learn how to breathe in a way that gives rise to these things. The Buddha doesn't tell you how.

Ajaan Lee gives some hints on how to think about the breath in different ways to aid you in this direction. Think of the in-and-out breath as an energy that flows through the body, and it can flow in the body in different ways. He gives you some ideas of how to work with it: changing the length of the breath, changing the depth of the breath, how fast or slow it is, where you think the breath is coming into the body. You can play with that. This is especially useful when you're meditating all day and you find that you've been overworking some of the muscles in the body that have been doing the breathing while the other muscles have been getting a free ride.

The Buddha talks about perception as being a mental fabrication that has an effect on the mind. Sometimes the effect is direct; sometimes it's through the breath. The way you perceive the breath is going to have an effect on how you feel it in the body. The breath is something that we can intentionally do. It's one of the few bodily processes that can go on either unintentionally and subconsciously, or intentionally and more consciously. The problem is that when we start getting conscious of it, we start screwing it up. We have certain cartoon ideas about where the breath comes in or which part of the body has to do the work, and if we don't vary those ideas, it gets very uncomfortable.

So learn how to change things. Learn to think of the breath coming in in different ways: coming in from the back, for instance, or coming down from the top of the head. If you notice that any one set of muscles is overworked, give those muscles a holiday, relax them, and tell yourself that you don't have to do the breathing. Some other part of the body will have to pitch in. In this way, you get some variety in the way you breathe.

Eventually, by being sensitive to what feels right in the breath, you can develop a sense of fullness. The Pali word *piti*, which we translate as rapture, can also mean refreshment, fullness, a sense of being energized or refreshed by the breath. Ask yourself, "What kind of breathing would be refreshing?" and see what comes up.

Often the attitude that the breath is a mechanical process doesn't allow the more refreshing side of the breath to show itself.

And don't think of the breath as having boundaries. We tend to squeeze the end of the in-breath or the end of the out-breath so that it's really sharp and clear that "Now you're breathing in; now you're breathing out." Well, you don't need to make it clear. Let things flow smoothly in the body and think of the breath energy filling the body. Which means that when you're breathing out, try not to squeeze things out. If the breath is going to go out, it'll do so on its own. Tell yourself you'll help it come in, but as for going out, that's its business. See how that changes the way you feel about the breath and how the breath energy in the body changes as well.

We're doing this partly so that we can have a sense of well-being. As the Buddha said, one of the purposes of concentration is to give you what he called "a comfortable abiding," a comfortable place to stay right here, right now. But it's also good for developing skillful qualities in the mind. That sense of well-being in the body is an important form of wealth.

When you think about being generous with material things, it's a lot easier to be generous when you have wealth, when you have a sense that you have more than enough. And it's the same when we're spreading thoughts of goodwill, thoughts of compassion to other people, thoughts of empathetic joy. You first want to have something good inside to spread. It's a lot easier to feel happiness for them when you've got some yourself, and you've got more than enough. You've got enough to share. This way, sitting here breathing comfortably is not simply a nice way to relax or a selfish activity. It puts the mind in the right mood to be more generous with its goodwill, more generous with its compassion.

There's a passage where the Buddha says that for a monk, the brahmaviharas—goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity for all beings without measure, without limit—are a monk's wealth. As monks, we don't have that many material possessions, but we can develop a sense of expansiveness, based on the sense of well-being we develop as we practice.

This applies not only to monks but also to everybody who practices. When you can give rise to a sense of well-being and can maintain it inside, you're more likely to want to share. Sometimes you start with people who are close to you, but then you begin to realize, why stop there? You want to develop a spacious mind. You've got this sense of well-being filling the body and filling the mind, and the ability to extend thoughts of goodwill to everybody, without exception, makes the mind even more expansive. Then it's like living in a much larger house, a much larger home.

So as you meditate, stop every now and then to take some time to spread thoughts of goodwill. Think of whatever sense of well-being you're gaining from the meditation and spread it around. Ask yourself if there's anybody out there for whom you have ill-will, someone you'd like to see suffer. And then ask yourself, "Well, what would you gain from that? What would the world gain from that?" Part of the mind might say, "Well, if they suffer maybe they'll come to their senses." But people very rarely change for the better when they're suffering. It's when they have a measure of ease that they can step back from their hunger for this and that, and think instead that maybe the way they've been going about trying to feed their desires is not all that good.

And when you're wishing goodwill for someone, what does it mean? Their happiness is going to have to depend on their actions, so you're wishing that they understand what kind of actions lead to genuine happiness and be willing and able to carry through with those actions. That's something you should be able to extend to anybody, no matter how horrible they've been. In other words, you're giving them some freedom, you're recognizing the fact that we all have freedom of choice and you're not closing people up in little boxes in your mind. Your own mind gains some freedom this way, too, as you allow them some freedom—the freedom to choose.

So we're developing a whole-body awareness, filling the whole body with a sense of well-being, a whole-mind awareness, filling the mind with a sense of well-being, and putting the two together. And then we think of spreading that goodness around.

It's very similar to the process of dedicating merit. You do something good and then realize that you're going to gain happiness as a result of doing that good thing, but then you think, "Well, how about sharing that goodness with somebody else? May other beings also share in this happiness." When you think that, your happiness expands. Whether they're actually in a position to receive that merit or not, that's beyond your control. But the fact that you're willing to share expands the merit.

In the same way, here with the meditation, you develop a sense of well-being and learn how to maintain it, learn how to put some variety in the breath so that you can keep the mind engaged with the breath. Then you think of spreading goodwill to others based on this sense of well-being. That expands the well-being, makes it even more solid. You learn an important lesson: that the more you share, the more you gain in return.

So think of the practice of meditation as an exercise in goodwill, starting with goodwill for yourself and spreading it to others. It's not a goodwill that's simply

expressed in phrases or words. It's goodwill expressed in skill: the skill of how to breathe, how to relate to your breath, and how to think of others, that they may be happy, too. Think about how, regardless of where other beings are right now, you've been there before. You can start thinking of the beings of the world as not being strangers in any way. Those who are poor, well, you've been poor. Those who are rich, you've been rich. Those who are powerful, you've been powerful before. Those who are oppressed, you've been oppressed. Those who've done good things, those who've done bad things, well, you've done good things and bad things, too. When you can think in this way, your goodwill becomes really strong, and the sense of well-being that comes with that goodwill becomes strong as well.

So develop inner wealth like this and then invest it by spreading it around. And you find that it grows to the point where you really can depend on it.