

The Pleasure of Goodness

August 13, 2012

When we're meditating, we're developing a form of happiness that's special. It's special in that it doesn't take anything away from anyone else. That's the way it is with all the aspects of what the Buddha called "making merit." In English, many people don't like the idea of making merit, but as the Buddha said, merit is another word for happiness.

And it's a kind of happiness that doesn't create divisions in society. If you're looking for happiness in material wealth, in terms of your status, in terms of praise, that's going to lead to divisions because one side gains something, somebody else has got to lose it. That right there creates divisions.

But when you're finding happiness through generosity, through virtue, and especially through meditation, you're not creating any divisions at all. In fact, your goodness spreads your happiness around and erases boundaries. So we should work as much as we can at developing these kinds of goodness.

Especially with meditation, because meditation is the most direct form of developing merit and is also the one you can do all the time. Every time you breathe in, every time you breathe out, you develop a mind that's at ease in the present moment, solidly based in the present moment. When you're solidly based like this, then you can see things clearly and you've got the energy to do what you see is the right, the skillful thing to do.

So as you contemplate where you're looking for happiness in life, remember that the truest and most beneficial happiness is the one that's found inside. Simply looking for happiness in ordinary pleasures is hedonistic. In other words, that you're just giving yourself a little hit of pleasure and then it goes away, goes away, goes away. But the pleasure and happiness that comes from doing good like this stays with you. Every time you remember it, you remember you did something good. That memory can stick with you and keep nourishing you.

As for material pleasures, they're not all that certain. Sometimes you have to do things that later you'd be embarrassed to talk about, embarrassed to think about. Sometimes it's actually bad karma, so that when you think about the pleasure you had, there's always a tinge of sadness that goes along with it.

But with the happiness that comes from merit, there's no tinge of sadness at all. It's thoroughly good. Before you do it, you think about it, "You're going to do something good like this," it feels good. While you're doing it, after it's done it feels good. That's because it really is based on goodness.