

Heedful, Ardent, & Resolute

October 25, 2017

Close your eyes. Focus on your breath. Take a couple of good, long, deep in-and-out breaths, and notice where you feel the breathing process in the body. Try to focus your attention there and keep it there.

And to make it more interesting, try to notice what type of breathing feels good. If long breathing feels good, keep it up. If not, you can change. Short in long out. Long in short out, or short both in and out. Deeper, more shallow. Heavier, lighter. Faster, slower. Try to find what rhythm and texture of breathing feels good for the body right now.

It's an important part of concentration that you have something that's interesting and pleasurable to stay with. Otherwise, the mind will resist staying and will go off someplace else. We also need the strength that comes from that sense of well-being with the concentration as food for the practice.

You may have noticed the contrast between the two chants just now. One says that we're subject to aging, illness, death, separation. And the other one says, "May I be happy." We're trying to find happiness in the midst of a world full of aging, illness, death, and separation. There's a connection between those two thoughts—one of which is a fact and the other is a hope—in the fact of that fifth contemplation: We're the owners of our actions. What we do will make a difference. So we realize that if we make our happiness depend on things that age, grow ill, and die, it's going to fall.

But one of the messages the Buddha taught was that it is possible to find a deathless happiness through our actions. The actions don't cause the deathless, because if it were caused it wouldn't be deathless. But actions can take us there. This is why the Buddha called his teaching a "path." It's like a road to a mountain. The road doesn't cause the mountain, but if you follow it, it can take you there.

And we need the sense of well-being that comes from concentration because there's a fair amount of work in the path. Sometimes it can get discouraging. This is one of the reasons why we take refuge in the Buddha. It doesn't mean that he's going to do the work for us, but it does mean that we take him as an example, that he's shown what human beings can do: that through their efforts they can make a difference—and not only just a difference, an important difference. They can find the happiness they want.

And in his example he's shown how it's done. Even though we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, ultimately we have to take refuge in ourselves because we're the ones who have to do the work. What this

means is that we try to take the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha and develop them within ourselves.

As the Buddha said, he found his awakening through three qualities: being heedful, ardent, and resolute. These are qualities we all have to some extent.

Heedfulness means realizing that there are dangers that we can avoid through our actions. This starts with simple things like just noticing there's a wild dog on the road and so you get out of the way. That's heedfulness.

Ardency is when you see that something is really worth doing well and you put your heart into doing it.

And being resolute is the quality of sticking with things even when they get difficult.

We all have these qualities to some extent. We wouldn't have made it here if we didn't have them at all. But the Buddha showed that you can develop them and they can take you far. So even if they involve a fair amount of work, the rewards are more than worth it.

There was one point where he even said if you could make a deal that they would spear you with a hundred spears in the morning, a hundred spears at noon, a hundred spears in the evening, every day for a hundred years, but at the end of that hundred years you'd be guaranteed awakening, it would be a good deal to accept.

Awakening is that amazing. The happiness it brings, the well-being it brings, is that amazing. He said you wouldn't even think that you had attained it through pain, once you'd attained it. The experience of awakening would have blotted out any sense that you had suffered on the path. Fortunately, that's not what we have to do. We don't have to get speared. But we do have to be heedful, ardent, and resolute.

So you need the well-being of concentration to sustain you. Otherwise it gets dry and dull. So allow yourself to enjoy the breath. Think of it bathing all the cells in the body, bathing all the nerves, all the muscles, all the way down to the tips of the fingers, the tips of the toes.

And think about what it means to be heedful, ardent, and resolute.

Heedfulness is a quality of wisdom. As the Buddha said, wisdom begins with the question, "What when I do it will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?" The wisdom there lies in realizing that some forms of happiness are more long-term than others and those are the ones that are worth going for. And that they'll depend on your actions.

Heedfulness assumes dangers but it also assumes freedom from danger—that your actions will make a difference. If your actions didn't make a difference, there would be no reason to be heedful. We'd just have to give up. But here what you do really does make a difference in your life. This is a principle we live by. We don't know for sure that we actually have freedom of

choice, but as the Buddha said, it's a good working hypothesis, a good belief to take on because otherwise it would be impossible to follow a path.

So you realize you want a long-term happiness and so you look at what you're doing that's leading in that direction. You also look at what you're doing that's leading in another direction.

This wisdom is also the basis for goodwill and compassion, because if you see that your happiness is going to depend on somebody else's suffering, you have to realize that that happiness is not going to last. They'll do what they can to destroy it.

There's a story in the Canon. King Pasenadi is up in his apartment alone with his queen, Queen Mallika, and in a tender moment he turns to her and asks, "Is there anyone you love more than yourself?" And you know what he's expecting. He wants her to say, "Yes, Your Majesty, I love you more than I love myself." But his queen is no fool. She says, "No. There's nobody I love more than myself. And how about you?" He has to admit that that's the case with him, too. There's nobody he loves more than himself.

So he goes down to see the Buddha, reports the conversation, and the Buddha says, "You know, she's right. You could search the entire world over and not find anybody you love more than yourself. At the same time, everybody else loves themselves just as fiercely." The Buddha's conclusion, though, is not that this is a dog-eat-dog world. His conclusion is: Never harm anyone in your search for happiness or get them to do harm.

So heedfulness is also the basis for compassion.

And it's the basis for a third quality that was attributed to the Buddha, which is purity, meaning that his actions really did avoid harming anybody. And that purity, he said, comes from very carefully looking at what you're doing before you do it: What do you expect to be the result of your action? If you expect any harm, don't do it. While you're doing it, if you see harm coming up, you stop. When it's done, if you realize that there was long-term harm or harm that didn't show up right away, go and talk it over with someone else who's on the path and then resolve never to repeat that mistake.

This applies to your thoughts, your words, and your deeds, although with your thoughts you don't have to talk it over to anybody else. You just realize that that was a harmful thought, feel ashamed of the fact that you've stooped to that kind of thinking, and resolve not to repeat it.

This practice, too, is based on heedfulness, realizing that you can't just go on good intentions. You have to develop your intentions so that they're skillful—in other words, they really do lead to well-being, and not just that you hope they lead to well-being or you would like them to lead to well-being. You actually learn from trial and error what works and what doesn't work.

All these qualities—wisdom, compassion, purity—come from the quality of heedfulness.

As for ardency, this has its wisdom, too. You listen to the Buddha's teachings and you're wise enough to realize that they're just not a matter of talking about or thinking about. You really do want to give rise to them. It's that desire to find what's skillful in life along with the good results of what's skillful: That's what's wise.

And this is going to require effort. You notice there are things that have come up in the mind that are unskillful, so you learn to let go of them and then you do what you can to prevent them from arising again. As for skillful things in the mind that haven't arisen, you try to give rise to them. When they're there, you try to maintain them and help them grow. You don't just watch them come and go and arise and pass away and say, "Well, that's just that; that's inconstant, stressful, not-self and I'm beyond that."

As the Buddha said, mindfulness is not a quality of just watching things coming and going. Mindfulness means seeing that there are skillful qualities you need to give rise to and remembering to give rise to them, because that's what mindfulness is: a quality of the memory. Once those skillful qualities are there, you remember to maintain them. You don't let them go.

And finally resolution: You really stick with this over time. The results are going to take time because the process of developing your discernment requires that you watch your actions again and again and again to start noticing things you didn't notice before. Your ability to see what's skillful and what's not will depend on your powers of concentration. The concentration sustains you in the effort of resolution and heedfulness and ardency, and it also makes you wiser, more sensitive.

So what this eventually comes down to is that the Buddha saw that by training the mind you can find true happiness. That means exerting some control over your mind—not like a control freak, wise control—because if your mind doesn't lie under your control, it can do you a lot of damage. It's like having an animal in your house that you haven't trained. It can damage your furniture, damage whatever valuables you have in the house, because the mind when it isn't trained will just grasp after anything. It's not used to looking for the long term. It wants its immediate hit. Whatever seems immediately pleasurable, it'll go there. If it's not trained, it won't stop and look to see, "This place I'm going: Is it safe is it not safe?"

We especially need to have the mind trained as we get older. As the body gets weaker and weaker and we can't depend on the strength of the body as we did in the past, it's going to be pure strength of mind that keeps us going. Yet all too often when the body is tired, we say, "Well I can't do it right now. I'm tired or things are hot or things are cold." All of which are issues of the body,

but we make them excuses for not training the mind. And that's just simple things like heat and cold, a little bit of fatigue, a little bit of pain. As aging comes, as illness comes, as death comes, the body is going to get a lot weaker, and you'll have to depend more and more purely on the strength of the mind. So this is why we have to develop it now while we have the opportunity. Keep coming back, coming back. Learn how not to get discouraged.

This is why we take refuge in the Buddha. He made a lot of mistakes on the way to his awakening. His period of self-torture lasted for six years and although it taught him a lot about resolution, it was a false path. Yet when he realized that, he didn't let himself get discouraged. He found a new path. He kept at it. This is the quality of resolution that, together with heedfulness and ardency, made him the Buddha.

We have these qualities in ourselves potentially, but his example reminds us during the times when we feel it's asking too much for us, that no, the happiness that lies at the end of the path will more than compensate for the effort that's put into being heedful, ardent, and resolute.

We have his example. We have the example of the noble Sangha, all the people who have gained awakening after listening to the Buddha's teachings. It can be done: men, women, children, ordained, not ordained. It's been done many times before. We take refuge in those people. Those are the examples we set before ourselves. We don't set up as models the typical examples we see in the media of what happiness might be. We look for people who are more reliable and whose happiness is more genuine.

And we let that encourage us to develop the qualities that enable us to become our own refuge. We really can depend on our minds to act in a way that delivers the happiness we all want deep down inside. A happiness that won't change on us. A happiness that will never disappoint.