

Scaffolding for the Practice

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An important quality when you meditate is to be heedful: to realize that even the little wanderings of the mind can have their repercussions.

This is why the Buddha's last piece of advice was to practice with heedfulness. Try to go all the way, he said. "Bring about completion" was the technical term. And that's how you go all the way: by being really heedful, to see that even the slightest attachment is going to weigh you down.

In the beginning, though, you don't let go of just everything. You realize that there are some things you've got to develop first. So you put in the work into developing your concentration, your mindfulness, your discernment, all the good qualities you're going to need on the path. Don't be in any hurry to let those go. You want to do a good job of building them.

It's like building scaffolding: You're going to put up a building and eventually you know the scaffolding is going to have to be torn down, but in the meantime you want it to be safe. You don't want to do such a flimsy job that you step on it and it collapses.

An important part of heedfulness knowing what to hold on to and what to let go. For the time being, you want to hold on to the path: the practice of generosity, the practice of virtue, the practice of meditation. These are things you hold on to. These are the scaffolding. And you want the scaffolding to be strong enough to hold you.

So whatever time it takes, put in the time. Sometimes we have the feeling that we've got to rush through the various steps to get to the good stuff at the end. But again, that's like putting up really weak scaffolding: You step on it and it may last for a couple of days, but then you step on the wrong board and you find the whole thing cracks and falls down. That's not what you want. That gets you worse off than you were before.

So put in whatever effort's required, put in whatever time is required. Don't think about how long you've been practicing or how slow or how fast the results are coming. You have to be confident: What you're doing here is building a safe haven for the mind, so you want to be solid, you want it to be in good shape.

However long it takes doesn't really matter. All that matters is that you stick with it and realize that if you're not following this path, you're following some other path. Every path goes someplace, but they don't all lead to the right place, at least not the place that you want. So you have to be very careful as you make your

choices.

The right choice starts with something very simple like this: You're watching your breath, and some other thought comes along about where you want to be next week or next month or next year, whatever. You say, "No, not right now. This is not the time for that. I've got to work on developing good qualities." Because part of heedfulness is realizing that maybe next week, next month, next year are not going to come. At least not in this body.

Or how they're going to come: You don't really know. But what you *do* know that what you're going to need is a lot of mindfulness and a lot of alertness to deal with whatever comes up. So you've got to develop those qualities. That thought pulls you back to what you're doing right here, right now.

So as long as your thinking pulls you back here, that's fine. When you don't need it to pull you back here, you put it aside. Just settle in with the breath, gain confidence in just being with the breath, that this is good place to be, an important place to be, the safest place to be right now.

And it's an honorable place to be, too. You're working on a happiness that causes no suffering. That's really rare in this world.

So don't let the mind wander astray.