

Anchored in the Present

January 9, 2012

When you close your eyes and focus on the breath, what's going to make a difference is that you stick with the breath. If you focus on the breath for a little bit and wander off to something else and come back and then wander off again, it's not going to make that much difference in the mind.

But it's when you make up your mind that you're really going to stay here—that you really have to be focused and single-minded about this: That's when there's going to be a difference.

This is the way it is in life in general. You've got to decide that there are a few things that really are important and you're going to focus your attention there as much as you can. As for the other things, if there's extra time left over from the important things, then you have time for those, too. But only then

There's a saying that anything worth doing is worth doing well, but it's not always the case. Some things are worth doing better than others. And focusing on straightening out your mind: That's *the* top priority.

No matter how much you say, "I want to help other people here, help other people there," if your mind isn't straightened out, you're going to create a mess. Because what are you doing to help them with? Are you helping them with the mess that's in your mind already? That's not helping anything at all.

It's when you straighten out your own mind that you have more energy and also more understanding to be of genuine help to others. So this always has to come first.

Remember the Buddha's image of the acrobats. One acrobat is standing on the shoulders of the other. As the Buddha said, each of them has to look after him or herself. In other words, you have to maintain your sense of balance, and as you maintain your balance, it makes it easier for other people to maintain their balance, too.

So this is where your focus has to be: getting your own mind straightened out. It starts by getting anchored here in the present moment. The breath is the best anchor, so make sure that the chain holding you to the anchor is really firm.

The chain is made of mindfulness, ardency, and alertness. Make sure all the links are solid, because no chain is any stronger than its weakest link. So try to keep all the links strong.