

The Troubles of the World

May 28, 2012

Close your eyes and look after your own mind. Watch your mind as it watches the breath to make sure it doesn't run away from the breath.

As the Buddha said, all the troubles in the world that really weigh down in the mind come out of the mind itself. So if we're going to look for a solution, we have to look into the mind, too.

In other words, we can't go around straightening out the rest of the world. If we tried to straighten out the rest of the world before we straightened out our own mind, one, the job would never be done, and two, what standards would we be using for straightening other people out? We've got to make sure our own minds are in good shape first so that we know what genuine standards of happiness are: genuine standards of moral behavior, genuine standards of concentration, discernment. We have to test those in our own mind first before we can go telling other people what they should be doing.

So focus in on your own mind right here. Make sure it's in good shape. Make sure it's clear, alert, and stable here with the breath, because this quality of stability is what allows you to see things clearly for what they are. Often, when the problems of the mind come up out of the mind, the mind is not willing to admit that, and it goes running away very quickly. But if you're stable and secure, then you're not threatened by seeing the mind's unskillful habits. Then you're in a much better position to deal with them. So let the mind settle in with the breath, have a sense of well-being with the breath.

This is why the Buddha said that you need concentration in order to gain insight, and you need insight in order to gain concentration. In other words, you have to understand your mind to at least some extent before you can get it to settle down. Once it's settled down, then you can see things even more clearly.

So develop a sense of familiarity with the breath and stick with the breath regardless. Wherever else the mind may want to wander off, you don't let it go. You stay right here. Just think of it not as the mind wandering off, but these thoughts are wandering away. The question is whether you're going to follow them or not. You don't have to follow them. You can stay right here, and they'll just disappear.

It's like clouds going over the mountains into the desert. As soon as they get over the top of the mountains, they just vanish into the air. And it's the same with the thoughts: As they come up in the mind when you're really full of awareness,

you're not latching onto them, you're not going to try to travel with them, and they just vanish.

Try to keep this quality of awareness all around and continuous. That's what allows you to see where the real problems are. Then you can take what you've learned either from listening to the Dhamma, reading the Dhamma, or from your own experience, and apply it to whatever's coming up.

That's when you really can solve the problems that are weighing down the mind. And when those problems are solved, then you look around and although there are problems in the world, they're not weighing down on you. So you're in a much better position to figure out which problems are worth dealing with or helping other people deal with.

But in the meantime you've got to take care of the problems inside first. Otherwise, you're just spreading your defilements around. And that doesn't help anybody.