

Encouragement in the Practice

June 2, 2012

Close your eyes and watch your breath. You watch it with your inner sense. Know when it's coming in, know when it's going out, know where you feel it. And allow those feelings to have some space so that they don't feel tight, don't feel constricted. Then place your awareness right there.

Remind yourself that this is going to take time. One of the drawbacks of our modern world is we get used to things being faster and faster and faster, but meditation doesn't happen faster. There's no instant pill, there's no Internet shortcut. You've got to do the work. And you've got to allow the causes to take time to develop. So you take care of the causes, and the results will come when the causes are complete. How soon are they going to be complete? You can't tell ahead of time. You have to learn how to be patient.

When the Buddha taught his noble disciples before he sent them out to teach, he started his teachings with the topic of patience, because it's through patience that we learn how to withstand a lot of things that are negative and not give up on the things that are good. Most of the stupid things we do in the world come when the mind says, "I can't take this anymore," and then you say things and do things that you later regret for a long time. So what do you have to do with that regret? Well, you have to learn how to be patient with the regret. Which is better? It's a lot better to be patient with difficult situations and see them through rather than having to add on the regret that comes from having done something stupid.

So how do you maintain patience? For one thing, you don't focus on the negative, you focus on the positive. You could sit here right now and think of all the things that are wrong. There's that stupid squirrel over there, she won't stop chirping. You might decide that the air is too cold. There are lots of things you could criticize. But that's not going to help make things easier.

It's easier to focus on where things are going well, what things are interesting, what things are attracting your attention in a positive way. Focus your attention on those things and you find that the negative things are a lot easier to deal with. Because if you think about the negative things and you think how long you've experienced them, how much longer you may be experiencing them, that weighs you down way too much right now. But if you just deal with what's happening in the present moment, the present moment, you can take it. Look for what's positive in the present moment because that's where you're going to be able to develop the goodness, that's where you're going to be able to develop all the good things you're looking for. Look for where the positive is and work on that, develop that.

We're all too quick to develop the negative and we tend to believe that whatever's negative going on in the mind is the truth, while the positive stuff is just make-believe. We've seen too

many cases where positive things have abandoned us in the past. But the positive things that we need in order to develop concentration, discernment: Those are real. There is a potential for a sense of pleasure, there's a potential for concentration, there's a potential for discernment in the mind. Those things are positive; those things are real. You have to learn how to focus on them, give them your energy, and again be patient. Because sometimes these things take time. You want your meditation to be fully cooked and not just half-cooked.

So stick with the causes and have confidence that the causes, when you keep at them, are going to bear results. It's in having the proper attitude that patience becomes a lot easier.

That way, the things that take time and are the valuable things in life will be yours at some point. If you want only the things that are instant, then they give their little instant bit of pleasure and then they're gone. There's nothing really left after. But with the meditation, even though it takes time, the results are more than worth the time.

The Buddha said that if you were to be speared by spears three hundred times a day for a hundred years, with the guarantee that you'd gain awakening at the end of a hundred years, he said that would be a deal worth taking. The results, when they arrive, are that positive.

So learn how to keep yourself encouraged on the path, because that's what gives you the strength to see things through.