

## *Friends Inside*

*August 19, 2012*

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

When the breath comes in, know it's coming in all the way. When it goes out, know it's going out all the way. Stick with it all the way in, all the way out.

Try to be friends with your breath. In other words, don't force it too much. Try to see what the breath needs right now, what the body needs right now, and then try to provide that. If you listen to the breath, then the breath will listen to you. In other words, if you see what the breath needs and you provide for it, then it will do all kinds of good work for you.

This is a basic principle: You've got to look for good friends inside and out.

We've been talking about the *nātha-karaṇa-dhamma*, or the qualities that provide you with an inner refuge, and one of these is finding good friends, staying with good friends.

This applies both inside and out. On the outside level, you've got to look at friends who will be helpful to you, who will be a good example for you, because you tend to become like the friend you're hanging around with. If you're hanging around with stingy people, you start becoming stingy as well. The way they think starts seeping into the way you think. If you stay with kind people, you start becoming kind.

The Buddha said to look for four kinds of friends:

People who are generous.

People who have faith in the principle of action—in other words, who believe that their actions really do make a difference and they have to be careful about their actions. That's a good example for you.

People who have virtue: They try not to harm others, they try not to harm themselves. That's a good example for you.

And then those who have wisdom and discernment: In other words, they understand what's important in life and what's not, what has long-term value and what has only short-term value.

If you hang around with friends like this, their qualities seep inside you. When you have those qualities within you—the qualities of conviction, generosity, virtue and discernment—those become your inner protectors.

It's the same when you meditate. You have to look at what kinds of mind-states you're hanging around with. When you're meditating here, you want to stay with your mindfulness; you want to stay with your alertness. These are your friends

because they look after you.

You don't want to go running off with your greed or your aversion or your delusion, because those are like false friends: They come and they talk you into doing stupid things and then when the consequences come, they run away. They're not going to take responsibility for your behavior. You're the one who's stuck with it.

So you have to be very careful about which mind-states you're hanging around with. Just because a thought comes into the mind doesn't mean you have to claim it as your own. It can just come from the firing of your neurons, which can send all kinds of weird thoughts through the brain. It's up to you to decide which ones you want to hang around with, which ones you want to feed and keep with you, because those become your friends. And as with external friends, the friends you have inside are the ones that are going to shape your behavior. You become like them.

If you stay with the whining voices in your mind, after a while you become a whiner. If you stay with the angry voices, you become someone who's very quick to get angry.

So be very careful about the thoughts you hang around with in your mind, which ones you take as your friends.

Take the ones that you can really depend on:

Thoughts of conviction: conviction in the principle of action, that what you do really is important.

Thoughts of generosity.

Thoughts of being virtuous: in other words, doing the right thing regardless of whether it requires sacrifices.

And then thoughts of discernment: how to find true happiness, a happiness that lasts inside.

Those are your friends both outside and in. You'll find that they're friends you really can depend on. As you develop these qualities inside, they become another aspect of having a mainstay, having a refuge inside. And you can depend on that. It'll see you through.