

A Refuge of Qualities

February 5, 2013

When you focus on the breath, watching the breath coming in, going out, you're developing good qualities of the mind. When you stay with the breath, you have to be mindful and alert.

Mindfulness and alertness are very useful qualities to have. They protect us in all kinds of ways. So it's good to exercise them to make them stronger. Because you use them not only when you're meditating but also when you're dealing with any activity out in the world. You have to develop on the qualities of your mind in order to protect you.

We talk about taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. What that means is we try to develop their qualities in our minds. We take them as examples: This is how true happiness is found; this is how human beings really are skillful human beings. We take their example and we apply them in our lives, and we try to strengthen the qualities that we need in order to be like them. It's in those qualities that we find our true refuge. Because with the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha outside, sometimes you can forget about them. But if you have these qualities in the mind, they're always there for you to use wherever you are, whenever you need them.

So remember, these are the things you can depend on. The body is strong for a while and then it starts getting sick, then it gets old. You don't know what old age is like until you've been there. This stops happening; that stops happening. Things you used to do very easily suddenly become more difficult. And all this happens without warning. That's just aging. Then there's illness and then death. That's when you're really going to need these qualities of mind to see you through.

This is the good thing about the qualities of the mind: When they're developed in the mind and you maintain them, they really can help you even when the body begins to fall away.

This is why the true refuge is found inside. So try to develop these qualities inside because that's what you'll have to depend on. When you've got them strong, you find that they really are reliable. They save you from all kinds of unskillful behavior. And that's the thing we need refuge from most.