

Feeding the Mind Every Day

September 20, 2013

When you focus on the breath, it's food for the mind: both in the comfort that comes when you stay with the breath in a way that feels refreshing all the way in, all the way out, and in the good qualities you develop as you do this.

Because refreshment can be found in other places, but it's usually a refreshment that comes from nice sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations. But it doesn't require any development of good qualities of the mind. In fact, it often makes the mind weaker. The sights have to be just like this; the sounds have to be just like that. And if they're not just like that, then the mind is at a loss, flailing around, trying to find something it wants.

Whereas when you're working with the breath, you have to develop mindfulness, you have to develop alertness, all sorts of good qualities of the mind just to keep the mind here. You have to have the conviction that this is something that's really important, and then you stick with it. That way, you develop concentration and discernment around these things as well. And those are the qualities that are actually real food for the mind. Those are the things that really strengthen it.

So when you tell yourself that you're too tired to meditate, you can ask yourself, "Are you too weak to eat?" "No." "Are you too weak to want to become strong?" "No." Okay, the breath is there for you to gain energy.

Working with the breath gives energy to the body, but specifically working with the breath can give energy to the mind. That's the most important food there is.

After all, the body wastes away. You look at it in the mirror today and it's very different from what you saw in the mirror last year. And it's only up to a point that things get better and better as you look in the mirror, and from that point on they just get worse and worse. Then bit by bit, the functions of the body are going to leave you without sending notice ahead of time, without asking your permission. Things just stop working.

So if you depend on the body for your strength, you're going to be disappointed in the end. But if you depend on the mind, that's something that can carry you all the way through.

So focus on feeding the mind every day, every day: feeding it with conviction and persistence, mindfulness, concentration, discernment—all the qualities you develop as you're staying here with the breath.