

## *Well-trained Inside*

*October 4, 2013*

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

Know the breath when it's coming in; know when it's going out.

The breath is a universal thing that each of us has, regardless of our background, regardless of our religion or culture.

And it's our safe spot inside. This is something that really belongs to us. Nobody else can feel your breath—aside from putting their finger next to your nose. But your own sensation of how the breath feels: That's something only you can know—and you can turn that into your safe spot.

Living together with one another, there are bound to be good times and bad times. You want to have a safe spot inside for both the good and the bad times so that you don't get careless in the good times and you don't let the bad times get you down.

So you need something really solid, because the world spins around us. There's gain and then there's loss. There's status, loss of status. There's praise, there's criticism. There's pleasure and there's pain. You can't take any of these as reliable. They turn into their opposites very quickly.

So you want to give the mind a place where it's right there in the middle, not spinning around with everything else. This is what the breath provides.

You watch it coming in, going out, and you have the right to decide what kind of breathing feels good. The breath is one of the bodily processes you can have some control over, so make use of that fact.

Ask yourself, when you breathe in each time, "What kind of breathing feels good? Where do you feel the breathing process?" Not just the air coming in and out through the nose but also the rise and fall of the abdomen, the rise and fall of the chest, the shoulders—wherever you feel any energy flow with the breath: Stay with that.

Allow it to be comfortable. Maybe longer breathing might be better—or shorter breathing. Deeper/more shallow. Heavier/lighter, faster/slower. Give those various kinds of breathing a try until you decide you like one particular combination. Then you stick with it.

The mind needs a good solid place to stay, and this provides a really good place for you.

At the same time, you're developing good qualities of mind. You're developing your mindfulness: your ability to keep something in mind. You develop your

alertness: noticing what's going on. And you develop a quality called ardency: when you want to do it skillfully.

As you develop these qualities with the breath, then it's easier to transfer them to other areas of your life where you go into situations knowing that you have to keep certain things in mind and you can't let yourself forget.

For instance, you keep in mind the idea that you want to be harmless. There are going to be situations where it's easy to forget that. But if your mindfulness has been trained, you're going to remember.

As for alertness: Whatever the situation is—and there are going to be lots of different situations where the more alert you are to what's actually going on—the more likely you are to do the right thing. You have to be alert to maintain that intention to do the right thing.

So you take these skills that you develop with the breath and you can transfer them to your life. In that way, you begin to see the benefit of training the mind.

So regardless of what your background is, regardless of what your life is, when your mind is well-trained, you find there's a lot more happiness. You're causing yourself a lot less harm and suffering, you're causing the people around you a lot less harm and suffering, because you're well-trained inside.