

Making Resolutions

January 2, 2014

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Stick with it all the way in, all the way out.

It's this process of sticking with it that makes a difference. You can be aware of your breath for a while and not stay with it, but that doesn't make much change in the mind. But if you stay with it continually, you find that the mind begins to settle down and feel at ease in the present moment. At first you may have to fight off a few other thoughts that tell you that you want you to think about this or think about that. You say, "Not right now. This is the time to give the mind some space to be its own person." It doesn't have to pick up any other duties. Just be with your awareness of the breath coming in, going out.

See how comfortable you can make it. Is longer breathing more comfortable? Is shorter? How about heavier or lighter? Faster? Slower? Do you want breathing that energizes you? Or do you want breathing that calms you down? You get to choose. This is the nice thing about the breath: You can adjust it for whatever you need. It makes it easier to stay in the present moment, and you use it as a tactic for making yourself interested in the present moment as well. Otherwise, if it's just in, out, in, out, in, out, pretty soon the mind is going to go running out away from the breath, and you don't gain anything at all. So try to get in touch with how the breathing feels. After all, this is the force of life.

So figure out how you can make yourself stay here.

This is the same principle with any kind of determination or any kind of resolution. You've first got to start out by figuring out: What would be a good resolution to make, as for the new year here? You look at your life, you look at things that are not going well in your life, and you can ask yourself, "What can I do to improve it?" Then you look at yourself and say, "Okay, what do I need in order to get that improvement? What can I do to make myself stick with that method of improving it?" That's using your discernment.

Once you've figured out a tactic, then you're truthful in sticking with it. Regardless of what other ideas may come up, you say, "Okay, I'm going to stick with this and see how it works." If you see after a while that it's not working well, okay, you can make changes. But give it some time. After all, some of these things take time to make a real change in the mind.

That means you have to learn how to give up a lot of other things that you might have been doing or might have been thinking. But tell yourself: For the sake of learning something new or developing new qualities of the mind, you have to be willing to make a trade. It's only when you're willing to make a trade that you can actually get somewhere in your practice.

Finally, you calm the mind down. When it starts getting all worked up about the fact that it's not doing the things it used to do and it's beginning to miss the things it used to do, okay,

you say, “Wait a minute. We know what the results of those things were. We’re here to learn something better.” Learn how to calm yourself down.

These four qualities—discernment, truthfulness, relinquishment and calming—have to go with every resolution you make, so learn how to apply them to your New Year’s resolutions or any other resolution you make about changes you want to make in your life—and particularly changes you want to make in your own behavior. It’s all too easy to think about things we would like other people to do to change. But those aren’t the changes that really matter. The changes that really matter are the ones that you do inside: in your own thoughts, and your own words, and your own deeds.

So learn to bring these four qualities of discernment, truthfulness, relinquishment, and calm to your resolution. You’ll find that you’ll be able to stick with it a lot longer and the results you get will be a lot more effective.