

The Suffering We Can Change

January 13, 2014

Close your eyes and take a couple of good deep breaths.

When you're meditating you're feeding the mind with good food. All too often we spend our time feeding it with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, which are basically junk food for the mind. Things you like and things you don't like are all mixed up together there. They don't give much real nourishment to the mind.

But the nourishment that comes when you train the mind to be still in the present moment, working with the breath energy in the body—noticing where the breath is feeling too short or too long, too heavy/too light, and making adjustments: That's how you nourish the body from within.

At the same time, by developing good qualities in the mind like mindfulness and alertness, you're nourishing the mind and making it strong. The mind that depends on things outside to be a certain way is a weak mind. It's like a hothouse plant: It has to be in this condition or that condition, and if the temperature gets too hot or the temperature gets too cold or the humidity goes up or down, or whatever, the plant's going to die.

You don't want a hothouse mind. You want a mind that can find happiness or at least a sense of well-being in any situation, even when things outside are going pretty bad.

You do it by developing these qualities: mindfulness, which keeps what's right and wrong in mind; alertness, which watches what's actually happening; and then the quality of ardency: If you see that what the mind is doing is unskillful, you can change.

As the Buddha pointed out, there are two types of suffering in life: There's the pain that comes simply from the fact that we see things and hear things that are sometimes not what we want, and smell, taste, touch things we don't want, we have to think about things that we don't want to think about. That's a normal part of life. But there's the suffering that comes from our own craving and ignorance and *that* can be changed. That doesn't have to be a part of life.

That's what we can work on. And it turns out that that's the suffering that really weighs the mind down. So you can work with it. There are things you can change in the way you approach the world, the way you look at the world. You get some practice by looking at how you approach your breath and look at your breath. How do you understand the breathing process? What can you do to make

it a much more pleasant process for the body, make it an object that the mind can really settle down with? That's something you can develop as a skill.

That's what we're working on as we stay here. We're working on the skills that strengthen the mind, that nourish the mind, so that regardless of what the world has to offer, you don't have to suffer from it. Sometimes it happens the world has really nice things to offer and yet we can still make ourselves suffer. That's what we've got to change. We want the mind to be strong inside so that when good things come, you don't suffer; when bad things come, you don't suffer. The mind knows what it's doing and it knows how to deal skillfully with whatever comes up.

That's the training we're trying to master here.