

## *Developing Around the Breath*

*June 3, 2014*

*Bhavana*, the Pali word for meditation, means to develop. We're trying to develop good qualities of mind.

If you want to stay with the breath, one, you have to be alert to what you're doing. Two, you have to be mindful, remembering that this is what you want to do: You're going to stay with each breath as it comes in and goes out. Try not to forget. And three, you want to be ardent. In other words, you want to do it well, skillfully. Because you realize that if the mind isn't trained to be skillful, there are going to be lots of bad consequences down the line.

So this is where you have to start, with simple things like this. These are the things you need to develop, because you can learn all kinds of good things but if your mindfulness isn't good, you forget to apply them. If you're not very alert, you don't even know what's going on: you don't know what the actual situation is to apply your mindfulness to. And if you're not really ardent, you say, "Well, I can do it tomorrow" or "I can do it sloppily." Those attitudes tear down any goodness you're trying to build.

So be mindful, be alert, be ardent. And you do that by developing these qualities around the breath.

It's not just an exercise like when you go down to the gym and all that energy gets wasted. Think of all the electricity they could generate from all the treadmills. It gets wasted there, but here it doesn't get wasted because when you're developing these qualities, you're developing right at the breath. The breath is where you're going to be anchored in the present moment, so you can see things as they arise and deal with them quickly. So not only are you exercising good qualities but you're exercising at the right place, right where they're really needed.

Otherwise, we can learn all kinds of good things, we read the Dhamma, listen to the Dhamma, but then when the time comes to actually make choices we forget. Or we remember but we say, "Well, I'm too tired." Or we have some other reason for not following through.

But if you're mindful, ardent, alert, and have a good sense of being at home here with the breath, where you get a sense of nourishment from the breath, that gives you all the help you need in order to do and say and think the skillful thing. And it's with the skillful things that we do and say and think that we build a good life for ourselves.

So this is where we start: developing these qualities. We already have them to

some extent, but we want to bring them to fullness so that they can really offer us protection, they really can offer us support—so that we really can depend on ourselves.

As the Buddha said, when you develop these qualities, you develop a refuge inside, something you really depend on. And not only while you're here at the monastery: You can depend on this refuge wherever you go, whatever you do. Because they're all right here, these qualities that make your refuge.