

Hold On to Let Go

July 31, 2014

Close your eyes and watch your breath coming in, going out.

As for anything else, you can let it go.

This is a basic principle in the practice. We hear so much about letting go, letting go, but there are some things you have to hold on to if you're going to let go skillfully.

Right now one of the things to hold on to is the breath. Watch it coming in, each time it comes in, all the way in, then all the way out. If you hold on to that, it's a lot easier to see when the mind is getting ready to move off in other directions.

If your grasp of the breath is loose, then all these other movements can take place in that loose grasp and suddenly you're off someplace else entirely. You wonder how you got there and how you're going to get back.

Actually, getting back is not hard: Just drop wherever you are and you'll be back with the breath.

When we say that your grasp has to be consistent, that doesn't mean it has to be tight and constricted. Let the breath have its freedom but just keep watch over it each moment of its coming in, each moment of its going out.

As I said, this is a principle all the way through the practice.

We have to hold on to our precepts. There are some things that we just don't do regardless. That's our gift to ourselves and to other people.

The more universal our application of the principles—we're not going to kill, we're not going to steal, no illicit sex, no lying, no intoxicants—then the more consistently we abide by that, the more people are protected: both ourselves and everybody around us.

So you hold on to the precepts so that you can let go of anything else that would pull you in the wrong direction.

The same principle with concentration; the same principle with discernment: You hold on to certain ways of looking at the world, seeing your actions as really important, that they're going to have an impact not only now, but also way into the future. So you want to be very, very careful. You want to hold onto that belief as long as it's necessary. Take that as your working hypothesis.

That makes you more careful about your actions, and there will be good results you see immediately.

So not everything is let go, let go. There are some things you've got to hold on

to if you're going to let go of the unskillful things first.

So learn how to hold on skillfully, because that's what provides you with the foundation for the point when ultimately you get to let go of everything. But that ultimate point doesn't come unless you've learned how to hold on skillfully in the meantime.