

Restraint of the Senses

August 21, 2014

Okay, focus on the breath.

Think of the breath as your home, the place you want to stay.

That means you have to arrange the home so it's a comfortable place to stay, so that the mind won't be jumping out the windows or running out the doors.

At the same time, be very careful about what you bring into the house.

For most of us, the mind isn't like a house. It's more like a bus station: All kinds of people are coming and going all the time, and there are a lot of unsavory elements.

So you've got to be very careful about opening your windows and opening your doors; when you should let somebody in and when you shouldn't. The kinds of thoughts you should let in, you open the doors just for them. Otherwise you keep the door shut.

Take some control over what's in your mind—and you do that by taking control over what you take in.

All kinds of things are happening all around us, with all kinds of things the mind can feed on, things it can hang around with. But you've got to be very careful about what you let in.

Of course, what you let in is determined by what goes out looking for things. Sometimes it's not the case that things just come wandering in. You go out and drag people into your mind. In other words, greed goes out and finds something to get worked up about and drags that in. Anger goes out and finds something to get worked up about and drags that in. So you've got to be careful about who's going in, who's going out.

This is called “restraint of the senses.” When you're looking, be very careful to see: Who's doing the looking? Are you doing the looking? Or is it greed? Or is it aversion? If any unskillful quality is doing the looking, look away or look in a different way. You can look at something that can incite lust but you can also look at it in a way that puts an end to lust. You can listen to things that would give rise to anger but you can also listen to them in a way that allows you to put the anger aside.

So be very careful about who's doing the looking, who's going out and choosing who to bring into the house.

When you're not cluttered with all these things, then the mind can settle down in the house with the breath and at ease.

So an important part of the meditation as you go through the day is sense-restraint: being careful about how you engage with other people, how you engage with things. All of this comes under the heading of sense-restraint.

When you protect your home this way, then it does become a good place to stay. If you leave the windows and doors open all the time and are out dragging in just everything around you, then when you settle down to meditate there's a lot of trash cleaning you've got to do. It's an endless job because once you clean things out you then go cluttering them up again.

So try to keep things clean as you go through the day.

In that way, this home of yours really does become a good place to stay.