

## *Medicine for the Mind*

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Meditation is like medicine for the mind. The Buddha was like a doctor. He saw that people were suffering. And the worst suffering is not the bad things coming from outside. It's things that the mind does to itself. So he focused on that.

Some people accuse him of being pessimistic, talking so much about suffering and stress. But, being like a doctor, he wants to talk about it so that he can cure it. There's nothing pessimistic about this at all. In fact, it's very optimistic; it's very positive. Something can be done about the suffering that the mind weighs itself down with. But we each have to effect the cure. Nobody else can come in and do it for us. The Buddha can show you the way, other people can show you the way, give you instructions, give you advice, give you encouragement. But the actually doing is something you've got to do yourself.

Fortunately, it's within our power for each of us to be able to do this. It depends of qualities that we all have at least to some extent. We have some mindfulness already, some alertness, we have some sense of how to bring our mind under control sometimes: the times when you have to say No to an urge, or the times when you have to encourage yourself. That's basically what meditation is all about.

So you've already had some practice in the treatment. It's simply a matter of getting it more focused and more precise—and strengthening all these qualities so you really can depend on them.

So wherever there's any stress or suffering in the mind, ask yourself, "Okay, what am I doing?" Focus here. Focus inside. All too often we focus outside. It's because of this, that, the other thing: The noise outside, the weather's too hot, the weather's too cold, that person did something really outrageous, this person did something you'll never forgive them for. You have to put all that stuff aside, because the suffering is in here.

Maybe they really did outrageous things, but you don't have to suffer because of that. You've got the opportunity to live in a world where there are good people and bad people, good speech, bad speech, and yet not suffer. That's what the skill is all about.

So think of this as medicine for your mind. You stay with the breath: It's one of those medicines that you have to stay with for a long time for it to do its work. It's like a cream you put on a rash. If you put the cream on and then wipe it right off, it's not going to do its work. You put the cream there and then let it sit. Gradually,

the medicine will seep in and it'll do its healing work.

Learn how to stay with the breath, stay with it as continuously as you can. If you slip off, don't get upset, just get back on. Stay on top of the breath.

This begins to soothe the body and the mind at the same time. And when the mind feels a little bit more soothed this way, then it's ready for some of the more difficult medicine. But at the very least, make sure you've got it soothed right now as you're breathing in, breathing out. This is part of the beginning treatment of the mind.

Just keep watch over the attention in your mind, where it's going. And if you see it wandering off then bring it right back. That's how you strengthen all the good qualities of the mind.