

Solitude

October 7, 2014

In a couple of days there are going to be a lot of people here. So while we have the opportunity, make the most of your solitude. Try to find some time to be by yourself.

In Pali this is called *kayaviveka*, physical solitude, where you're just away from other people.

And then you try to develop *cittaviveka*, mental solitude. In other words, you're not sitting there just talking to yourself about all kinds of stuff. You're with one thing here in the present moment: the breath in and of itself just coming in, going out. As long as you're going to have a companion, make the breath your companion. Try to have a nice friendship with the breath.

As soon as you focus on the breath, sometimes you find that it immediately tenses up and gets uncomfortable. Well, try to back into it, sidle up to it. In other words, find some other way of approaching the breath where you're not putting too much pressure on it—so that you're bathed in breathing sensations all around the body.

In this way, it's good to be alone: The body gets healed, the mind gets healed, and you begin to see things a lot more clearly.

This is one of the reasons why we recommend that if you have some issue in life you're trying to think about, wait until the end of a meditation period. Then give yourself, say, ten minutes, and say, "Okay, now that the mind has been calm, it's been treated with the breath, soothed with the breath, let's see what it thinks, how it looks at things from this perspective." Sometimes nothing will come up and sometimes interesting things will come up.

But before that point, don't think about that topic at all. Pose the question at the beginning of the meditation, then put it aside and don't go anywhere near it during the course of the meditation. Only at the very end should you think about it.

Because the mind is like anything that you use: You have to take care of it. Otherwise you wear it out. The image that they like to use in the forest tradition is that the mind is like a knife. If you just keep chop, chop, chopping away, after a while the knife gets dull. There are times when you have to stop using the knife, sharpen it, and then bathe it in oil so that it doesn't get rusty. Then you put it away. When you need to use it, that's when you bring it out.

It's the same with your mind. You don't want to be thinking about things all

the time, especially scattered things around the past and the future: thinking about this person, thinking about that person. If you're going to think, think about something that's right here: the sensation of the breath coming in, going out. Make this your friend for the time being. Make this is your companion. This is the only other person in the world who matters while you're meditating.

If you have that attitude, then the qualities of solitude, instead of being lonely, becomes something really refreshing, something you look forward to, because you realize that it's healing for the body, healing for the mind.

And it enables you to take on your other duties, when you're dealing with other people, in a much more effective way—in a way that doesn't cause you any harm, doesn't cause them any harm. That can be your gift to yourself and your gift to the world.