

Sticking with It

January 4, 2015

Close your eyes and watch your breath. (That applies to the little ones too, okay?)

Try to stay with the breath all the way in, all the way out. Make up your mind that you're going to stay here and then stick with that intention.

This principle of "sticking with it" is a really important part of the practice, because only when you stick with things do they have a chance to grow. With the qualities we're trying to develop in the mind, you can make up your mind for one second that you're going to do it but then leave it for the rest of the day, it doesn't grow very much. You have to be able to carry it through.

This is one of the reasons why we take the precepts every week: to remind us that this is something we want to carry through all the time. Stick with the principle that you're not going to kill, steal, have illicit sex, you're not going to tell lies, you're not going to take intoxicants. You have to remind yourself of these principles because there are so many things outside in the culture outside that would pull you in another direction. But you've got to learn how to stick with it. Reminding yourself all the time on a regular basis is one important way of doing that.

But you also have to understand the value of what you're doing. This all comes under discernment. We talk about how virtue leads to concentration and concentration leads to discernment, but you've got to use your discernment to come back and train your concentration and your virtue as well.

Think about the good that would come in this world if everybody stuck by the precepts. Then you have to tell yourself, "Am I going to wait for everybody else to do this? At the very least I can make it happen in my own life." Then you have to use your discernment to learn how to stick with it. When you're really tempted to break a precept, how do you stick with it, how do you reason with yourself? You remind yourself of the long-term consequences of breaking the precept and the long-term benefits of not breaking the precept. This is how you stick with these things.

This is important in any kind of determination, in any kind of vow you might make. This is the time of year when people are making vows and resolutions about how they want to change themselves in the coming year. But an important part of every vow is not just making it but then sticking with it. All too many vows don't even make it to January 15th. We want to see if we can make ours last all the way

through the year. You've got to learn how to talk to yourself, reason with yourself, figure out your mind's weaknesses and learn how to overcome them.

That's the way you stick with your precepts, that's the way you stick with your concentration, that's the way you stick with every aspect of the practice.

If you look at your five precepts and see that they're okay, then you might want to move on to the "four," which may sound strange but these are four virtues that the Buddha talks about.

The first one is just this: sticking with the five precepts.

Then there's the virtue of sense-restraint.

Then there's the virtue of right livelihood, purity of your livelihood.

And then there's the virtue of contemplating the requisites. In other words, every time you use food, clothing, shelter and medicine, think about why you're using these things so that you don't use them excessively and you don't get stuck on the pleasures that come from them. These four principles take the practice of virtue to a higher level.

So wherever you see you're lacking someplace in your virtue or there's more virtue that you can work on, this is the opportunity. You've got a whole year, we hope. May all of us have a good year. What makes it a good year is not so much whether you live to the end of the year but whether the amount of time you have is spent well. You make the right decisions in what you do and say and think.

So take this opportunity to look at your actions, look at your words, look at your thoughts, and see where they're going outside the bounds of what's proper, going outside the bounds of what's skillful. And use your discernment to bring things back in line.