

## *Exercising Your Freedom*

*February 28, 2015*

Put aside all your other thoughts and just think about the breath.

Where do you feel the breath right now? Focus on that. Watch it all the way in, all the way out. Don't go running around.

Other thoughts come through but you can just let them through. They don't have to be addressed to *you*. Think of them as mail going for somebody else. We tend to take things on. The mind is like a big vacuum cleaner: Everything that comes near, it just sucks right in, sucks right in. You have to learn how to turn it off. Turn off the part of the vacuum cleaner and just be in the present moment. Choose very carefully what you want to focus on.

Because this is something we really can choose. There are so many things in life where we don't have much choice. But what you do with your own mind is something you can choose. Yet for most of us we just leave it to its own devices: Whatever comes up in the mind, we think, "Well, this must be my thought, I must feeling this, this must be *me*." As a result, we end up suffering a lot. It's like somebody who doesn't know what to eat and what not to eat. You just take things in, take things in.

So exercise some choice inside. Things outside may not be the way you want them to be, but at least you can choose to make the mind suffer or make it not suffer. Because that's the suffering that really weighs down the mind: the suffering the mind causes itself.

So you want to give the mind something good to think about. This is why we think about the breath. It's a neutral place to stay and can actually become a very pleasant place to stay. It doesn't have a lot of issues but it can be very comfortable. Figure out right now what kind of breathing would feel good for the body. Does it need some energizing? Well, breathe in a way that gives it more energy. Does it need some calmness? Breathe in a calm way. You can ask yourself if deep breathing feels good or shallow breathing feels good. There are lots of possibilities right here at the breath.

You have the freedom to choose, because there is that element of freedom in every moment. And the most important choice is whether you choose to make yourself suffer or not. Most of us don't really realize that we have the choice. This is one of the things that meditation is good for: It makes you realize you have some choices you never thought of before.

So learn how to keep the mind here and learn how to teach it how to let go of all of the various thoughts that might come in and pull you away from the breath. Learn how to read what kind of breathing the body needs right now.

All these are skills that are really useful for gaining some control over what's going on inside, and learning how to exercise that freedom of choice so that it really is to your benefit and for the benefit of others. In other words, you find a happiness that doesn't harm anybody at all.

So realize you've got this freedom and make the most of it. Otherwise it just gets discarded every moment, every moment, every moment. There's no way you can go back and pick up the freedom you had in some previous moment and change it. You had the

choice but you didn't really exercise the choice well. You've got to let those things past.

Focus on what you've got the choice to do *right now*. Because this is where you really can make a difference.