

Hold On to the Right Perceptions

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Try to hold the perception of “breath” in mind. In other words, don’t hold the perception of “rain” or “cold” or “wet” in mind. You could be focusing on those things but then you’d be aggravating the problems that go around it.

The Buddha pointed out it’s largely our perceptions that disturb the mind. You can be in situations where there are lots of different potentials that you could be focusing on. So try to choose what’s the wisest thing to be focused on right now, what perceptions you want to hold in mind right now. In addition to the breath, you might want to hold on to the perception of “warm,” to counteract the fact that it’s pretty chilly outside.

Remember that story of Ajaan Fuang out there in the rainstorm. He found himself stuck in a rainstorm unexpectedly at midnight. The wind and the rain were getting into his umbrella tent, so he packed all of his robes except for his under robe into his bowl to keep them dry. Then he sat there and his topic of meditation was, “The body may be wet, but the mind isn’t wet, the mind isn’t wet, the mind isn’t wet.” He kept that in mind, and that got him through the night. His mind was able to settle down and be calm.

So when there are difficulties in life, be very careful about what you’re focusing on. You can focus on the difficulties or you can focus on the things that give you strength at that time.

One of the virtues of meditation is that it gets you skilled at sticking with one perception despite other contacts that are coming in. The contact comes and it goes. And the perceptions, if you’re not careful: They can come and go, too. But you want to latch on to the ones that are really helpful right now. That gives you the strength to deal with things that are difficult.

We live in a world where there’s gain and loss, status, loss of status, pleasure and pain, praise and criticism. If you focus on these things in the wrong way, they can cause a lot of suffering. Even the pleasant things, if you focus on them in the wrong way, can bring suffering. So you have to learn how to hold the right perceptions in mind.

That way, your goodness, your internal goodness, stays strong. Your sense of inner strength stays strong. And that’ll see you through.