

A Happy Path

April 14, 2015

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

Stay right on top of the breath, right now, right now, so that you can see what's happening in the mind right now. It's only when you see it happening that you can do something effective about it.

If you remember a bout of anger yesterday or a bout of lust or a bout of fear, or greed, whatever: All you've got is the memory. You don't actually see it in action. You don't see what triggered these things. You can have some ideas and some theories about what triggered these emotions, but you don't really know them until you've watched, "Oh, this is what's happening. This is what the mind is saying to itself now," that's flipping it over into anger or greed or whatever.

So you want to be right on top of things. When you're with the breath, you're right in the present moment. You can't watch a past breath, you can't watch a future breath, you can watch only this breath right now. So when you're with this breath, you know you're right here.

Then whatever else comes up, you can deal with it effectively. When the Buddha talks about being in the present moment, it's interesting: It's always in the context of death contemplation. He says, "Tomorrow death may come." And not just tomorrow: There's another place where he says to try to focus on what you can do right now with this breath coming in, this breath going out, because you don't know if you're going to live for the next breath.

So it's not a matter of settling into the wonderful present moment. It's because the present moment is where the work should be done—and where good work can be done. It's good work to be able to be on top of these things and not let unfriendly emotions—i.e., unfriendly to your well-being—take over.

There's another passage where someone is commenting on why is it that the monks living out in the forest seem so bright and happy? And as the Buddha said, "They live in the present moment." Because they're doing something that's really worthwhile doing there in the present moment. They're not being distracted by all kinds of other things. And as the mind gets cleaned out like this, of course your attitude is going to be clean, your mood is going to be clear, because you're working on something that's really worth doing.

Now, whether it's going to be a long-term job or a short-term job: We can't determine that ahead of time. As for the people for whom it's short-term: It's as if the Buddha picked all the flowers that were blooming at that time, and that just

leaves the rest of us.

So we have to be ready for the long haul. But it's a journey that you take one step at a time, dealing with each breath one breath at a time, trying to breathe in a way that feels really good. This helps keep you here with a sense of well-being, with a sense that you belong right here. It's a good place to be, and you're doing work that's good to do. And even though that's not the ultimate happiness, it's a happy path to be on.