

Proper Determination

June 28, 2015

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

And watch your mind watching your breath. Try to keep the mind comfortable with the breath, and make the breath itself comfortable so that it's easy for them to stay together.

Meditation is one of the meritorious activities the Buddha said leads to happiness. As in that passage at the end of the precepts: It talks about the rewards of observing the precepts. They lead to wealth, they lead to a good destination, they lead to nibbana. All the good that we do is going to lead to good results.

And as the Buddha stated at one place, if you're a virtuous person then whatever vows you take in terms of how you want to direct that merit tend to go in the direction you want it to go.

So you have to be very careful to think: In what direction do you want these things to go to? All the goodness in your life: Where do you want to focus the good energy?

Ajaan Fuang had a student one time who was an air force general. He had just one or two stars. And he went with a couple of other generals, a whole lot of them, to see Luang Por Chob. The other generals had more stars than he did. That night they were talking with him about practicing the precepts and maybe doing a little meditation. Luang Por Chob asked them, "What do you want out of your gift of merit here?"

Some of them said they wanted a higher rank, some of them said they wanted some political power—this, that and the other thing. When it was the turn of Ajaan Fuang's student, he said, "I don't know, all I seem to want is nibbana."

The next morning as the generals were waiting for the monks to come for alms, he was down toward the middle of the line. Luang Por Chob came down from the sala. He kept his bowl closed past the first, second, third, fourth people in line. He finally stood before this man and opened his bowl. His bowl was empty and all this man had was half a salted egg. He said the sound of that salted egg hitting the bottom of the bowl stuck with him for many years after.

Luang Por Chob was basically telling him, "That kind of determination, that kind of focus for your practice: That's the safe one, that's the good one."

As for rank and wealth, you look around you. The good things of the world: are they really good for you in terms of the goodness of your mind?

The more wealth you have, the more your wealth owns you. You have to look

after all your things, make sure they don't get stolen, make sure they don't wear out.

You've got rank: You've got people running around after you all the time. Where are you going to find time to develop the mind?

So look at whatever goodness you want out of your practice and be very careful about what you choose. As we say in that chant: "May you live for a hundred years and be strong and beautiful and healthy." Well, you look at people a hundred years old: How many hundred-year-old people are beautiful and strong and healthy?

Be very careful about what you want and how you focus your energies. Because as the Buddha said, if you're a virtuous person, the area you focus on is what you're going to get.

So choose your determination wisely. Choose wisely what kind of rewards you want out of the practice.

At the very least make sure that you're not deluded by anything that you gain.

If you do gain wealth, remember the Buddha's image of wealth. He said he had a dream before he gained awakening. There was a huge pile of excrement he was climbing but he wasn't made dirty by it. The excrement stood for wealth. From all the merit that he'd made in the past, that wealth was going to come to him, but he wasn't going to get soiled by it.

So be very careful especially about wishing for wealth or power. They can get you dirty if you're not careful. Focus on something that makes it easy to maintain your cleanliness.

At the very least, as I said, focus on meditating so that you can get past the delusion that would get you soiled by these things—so that no matter what goodness you gain in terms of the world, it doesn't place a limitation on the mind. Instead of being a liability, make it an asset. That kind of determination is really worth making.