

Creating Interest in the Present

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The mind is used to wandering around, traveling around. That's what samsara means: the wandering-on.

You can see it as you sit here. Focus on the breath and within a few minutes you're off someplace else. So you've got to train the mind with new habits to get it to stay, to stay in place. That's why we work with the breath, make the breath comfortable, make the breath interesting. Because one of the reasons the mind wanders around is because it's looking for something of interest. So give it something of interest right here.

Remember the breath energy in the body has a lot to do with your health: physical health, mental health. So at the very least, whatever time you spend with the breath is good for the body, it's good for the mind. Even if in the beginning it's not all that still, if it keeps pulling away at the leash, still it's got some time to work with the body, work with itself using the breath. And that time is always well spent.

So as you try to settle down now, try not to be discouraged that the mind isn't settling down altogether. Remember the image of the committee: lots of opinions in here. Some opinions want to stay; some opinions want to go. Try to side with the ones who want to stay and strengthen them by giving yourself something good to do here in the present moment.

If working with the breath gets dull, then you can work on thoughts of goodwill, you can contemplate the parts of the body to see how unattractive they are if you were to take the body apart.

In other words, all this is good work for the mind. It strengthens good qualities in the mind. But you've got to stay here. If you go wandering around, the work doesn't get done. And if you don't do the work, who's going to do it? And if you don't do it now, it doesn't get easier as you get older.

So here's your chance to do some really important work inside, some really crucial work inside: the skills you need to deal with the body, deal with the mind on their own terms, so that when the relationship between the mind and the body gets difficult, you're not adding more difficulty on top of it.

In other words, when things get old in the body, things get sick in the body, when the body's getting ready to die, you can train the mind so it doesn't have to suffer from these things. But to do that, you have to get to know the body really well in the present moment.

So make the most of your time here.