

The Four Bases of Strength

November 28, 2015

Focus on your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out.

Try to stay here with a sense of conviction that this really will make a difference in your life: the ability to get the mind to settle down and be still. Because the mind needs to be trained. If it's not trained, it can take good things and make a mess of them. If it's well-trained, it can take bad situations and make something good out of them.

So this is a skill you need in order to make sure that your happiness is reliable. You believe that your actions really do make a difference in training the mind – that's what the conviction is all about. Happiness not a matter of things just floating your way. You put in the effort and the results will come. You put in skillful effort, you get good results. If the effort is unskillful, you don't get good results. All too often it's because our effort is not skillful that we complain, "I put all that effort in and nothing happened." It's not just the amount of effort. It's the skill that's involved makes all the difference.

So when you're focusing on the breath, try to be with the breath in a way that feels just right. The breath feels good, your focus on the breath is not too strong, not too weak, and you stick with it continually. Whatever else comes up, you don't leave. No matter how important—doorbells ringing, phones ringing, whatever—you don't get distracted. You just stay right here. You know that those sounds are in the background but you don't focus on them. You focus on the breath.

In this way, you begin to see that it really does make a change in the mind. It changes your values, it changes your level of strength, your ability to resist things that would pull you away. All of these things are good skills to have. When you meet up with difficulties in life, if your mind is not under control, it'll go creating more suffering, pulling you in different ways that are not all that helpful. And if you can't control it, it's going to run wild. Instead of being helpful, it's going to be part of the problem. So you want to make sure that your mind is not part of the problem. And you do this by putting in skillful effort.

So have some conviction that when you do this, it really will make a difference. That way, you give it more attention, you put in more concerted effort. When things don't go well, you don't just give up. You try to figure out what's going wrong.

All these qualities strengthen the mind and give it power. You've got to have the desire to do this; you need the conviction that it's going to work. You put in

the effort, you pay careful attention to what you're doing, and you put effort into figuring out, when things don't go well, how to straighten them out.

All these qualities are strengths in the mind. And we need strength of mind to live in this world, because there's so much out there that just tears down the strength of our goodness. And when our goodness gets torn down, what do we have left? Nothing much at all.

You may have lots of things, lots of relationships, lots of status, but if the goodness of the mind is torn down, those things and relationships and status will actually be to your harm. So have some conviction that the meditation really is useful and that you really can do it. It's something human beings can do. You're a human being. You've got the mind that needs to be trained. You've got the teachings that tell you how to train it. Now it's just a matter of getting to work.

Come at this with a sense of conviction or with a sense of being inspired by the example of other people who've trained their minds. That'll help you get through a lot of difficulties.