

What Comes First

March 2, 2016

Bring your mind to the breath. Notice how the breathing is feeling, because the breath is a kind of food for the mind and for the body. Good breathing nourishes the body and nourishes the mind.

So ask yourself, “What would be some good breathing right now?”

It’s something we often don’t pay much attention to. It seems to be a function that if we don’t pay attention to it it’ll do it on its own so it doesn’t really matter.

That’s what we think. But sometimes when you let it do on its own, it gets into weird rhythms, unhealthy rhythms. Especially if there’s pain someplace in the body: You tend to shrink away from the pain, and that’s going to affect the way you breathe.

So think of the breath being more expansive. The breath is there before the pain; the breath can go through the body before the pain. Give it some space. Don’t let the pain take over.

This attitude applies to the mind as well. We can get the mind into concentration even though there are painful thoughts in the mind about memories of the past, things we’re afraid of in the future, because we don’t let them take priority. We have to let the calm mind take priority.

Remember that your awareness is here first. All those other things come in later. So make your awareness strong. Make your alertness strong.

One of the words they use in Pali is *indriya*, which is translated as “faculty” but basically means something that’s in charge, something that’s dominant. You want your concentration to be dominant, you want your discernment and mindfulness to be dominant.

That means you’ve got to give them pride of place. They come first, not only in terms of priorities but also simply because they’re here first. Don’t let these other things push them out.

Ajaan Chah’s image is of a house with one chair. You sit in the chair. The things that come visiting in don’t have a chair to sit in. They’re at your pleasure. If they take over the chair, then you’re at their pleasure and that makes it difficult: There’s no comfortable place for you to sit and they can order you around. So you have to be in the seat and occupy it fully. In other words, stay right here and let those other things come later. That way, the mind gets the chance to have a sense of being solidly here and secure. It’s not pushed around by events outside.

Only that kind of mind can find any real happiness.