

Careful Attention

April 2, 2016

We close our eyes because we want to give full attention to the breath.

When you're meditating: What's the difference between meditating on your breath and just breathing? It's the quality of your attention. You want to give it your full attention.

This is called *citta* in Pali. It's one of the bases of success in the meditation: that you pay careful attention to what you're doing and careful attention to the results that you're getting.

Because you want to detect the movements of the mind: This is what the meditation is all about. It's seeing how the mind moves, seeing the mind's actions, and how those actions ripple out: from your thoughts into your words and deeds and from your words and deeds into the world. Then they ripple back.

So you want to be very careful about what goes rippling out to begin with.

And it's right here in the present moment that that happens.

So you want to be anchored in the present moment.

Take the breath as your laboratory to learn, "This is what happens when you think about the breath in that way; that's what happens when you think about the breath in this way. This is what happens when you try to adjust the breath so that it's comfortable."

From trial and error you find out which ways of adjusting the breath really are worthwhile, making it easier to stay with the breath, making the breath more interesting.

But it's the quality of your attention that makes all the difference, as in the whole question of sitting and meditating. As Ajaan Chah once noted, if just sitting in the sitting posture were enough, then chickens would have beaten out the human race a long time ago.

It's the quality of your attention that you bring to the breath: That's what matters. After all, the Buddha was focusing on his breath on the night of his awakening. What's the difference between his breath and yours? There was no difference in the breath. There was the difference in the quality of the focus and the amount of attention that he paid to what his mind was doing.

So first pay attention to how you're dealing with the breath. Then that ability to notice what's going on in the present moment will then start seeping into the mind. You'll see more and more clearly, "Oh, this is how the mind thinks, this is how greed comes in, this is how greed takes over." The same with lust, the same

with anger, the same with delusion, the same with fear, jealousy. You want to see these things in action.

Otherwise, they slip in and you don't realize it. If you can detect them, though, when they're in their very early stages, then you can do something about them. You're more in control.

So pay careful attention, because the quality of your attention is what makes all the difference.