

The Constant Teachings

June 5, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath: all the way in, all the way out.

Try to keep your mind as constant as possible with the breath, because there are so few things in life that are constant.

We depend on things outside, we depend on people outside, and then we go our separate ways. We have to find new things to depend on all the time. And if you're looking outside for things to depend on, looking outside for your refuge, it's a never-ending process.

You have to look inside for the goodness that you can create in the mind. This is something that can be constant. The principles behind what's good, what's skillful: They never change.

No matter how many Buddhas there have been throughout the course of time, they all teach the same thing: "Abandon what's unskillful; develop what's skillful." What's skillful? Generosity is skillful. Virtue is skillful. Meditation is skillful.

These are the things that you can really depend on. They create within the mind a refuge that grows stronger and stronger until finally you reach a refuge that you don't have to work on anymore at all.

That's what we're working toward now. If you're not working toward that, it's just one inconstant thing to the next to the next to the next. Then disappointment, then you find something else, and then disappointment again.

It's when you look inside for your refuge: That's when you're on the right course, on the right track. This way, with the comings and goings of the human beings around us, we still have something firm that we can hold on to. If you hold on to it, then the mind itself becomes firm. If you don't hold onto it, then even though the principles are there, you're still washing around.

So take advantage of this opportunity. We have the teachings of the Buddha to show us what's constant in this world. The principles of karma, the principles of what's skillful and unskillful: These things are constant.

As the Buddha said, they're true across the board. There are not that many teachings about which he said that: just the four noble truths and then the teachings on abandoning what's unskillful and developing what's skillful. Those are the constant teachings; those are constantly true. So we look for something reliable there.

You probably know the story from the Commentary of the woman whose baby child died. She refused to accept the fact that he had died. She went around

looking for medicine for him. Someone finally said, "Well go find the Buddha."

The Buddha said, "Okay, there is a medicine for this. It's mustard seed, something very simple, but it has to come from a family where no one has ever died."

So the woman goes around, and at every house she asks, "I need some mustard seed." They'd be willing to give her the mustard seed, but then she asked, "Has anyone died here?" They'd say "Oh, of course: my aunt, my uncle, my father, my sister, all kinds of people. Everybody in the family just keeps dying."

As the Buddha said one other time, it's just like earthenware pots. Every pot eventually is going to get broken. In the same way, everybody dies.

It was when the woman was able to accept the fact of death that she could accept that her child had gone. She saw that death was everywhere, and she was no exception.

None of us are exceptions here. Aging, illness, death, separation: These are the things that we have to face. But if we find something constant inside the mind, then we can face these things and we don't have to suffer from them. There may be pain, but we don't have to suffer from the pain.

This is the most important skill that we can work on.

So here's your chance, here's your opportunity to develop something that really is worthwhile, something that really is dependable, something that's constant all the way through.

You approach it by making your mind more and more constant. This is why we practice concentration: to get the mind better and better at being mindful, being alert, so that it can stay in one place, not budge around and not get pushed out.

Settle in here and make sure you can stay here.

In that way, the inconstant things of the world can wash over you but don't have to wash you away.