

## *Knowing Your Intentions*

*June 9, 2016*

The Buddha teaches there are basically three kinds of goodness: the goodness of generosity, the goodness of virtue, and the goodness of meditation.

The word meditation literally means to develop. You're developing good qualities in the mind.

You do this first by focusing on the breath. Take a couple of good, long, deep in- and-out breaths. Notice where you feel the breathing. Try to stay with the sensation of the breath all the way in, all the way out.

If the breath feels comfortable with that rhythm, keep it up. If that rhythm doesn't feel comfortable, you can change it to another one: longer/shorter, faster/slower, deeper/more shallow, heavier/lighter.

The breath is the force of life. So if it feels good coming in, it's a sign that it's going to be good for the body. Even if it doesn't feel good, it's going to be good to some extent but not as good as it could be if you give it some attention, give it some space, and notice what really feels best right now.

This way you get more centered in the present moment. Your concentration gets strengthened. Your mindfulness gets strengthened: your ability to keep things in mind. Your alertness gets strengthened as well. So you can really see what's going on in the mind.

The mind is what shapes your life. The things coming in from outside have some impact on you, but the real impact is what you think about them, how you interpret them to yourself, and what you decide to do in response.

Sometimes you don't even respond: You're already interpreting them before they come. This is something you have to watch out for. The reason you can't see it clearly is because you're always running with it.

It's as if somebody's pushing you from behind. You don't know who's pushing you. It turns out you're pushing yourself, but part of you doesn't realize that.

So you want to get the mind really still so that you can know yourself clearly, to see what's going on. An intention comes up in the mind, and you can notice that it's there and then notice whether it's skillful or not. All too often the intentions come, but we don't even know they're there. We're just driven by their force.

All too many times you can ask someone, "Why did you do that?" And they say, "I dunno, I just felt like it." Well, feeling like it: That's the intention that's hidden. There's no way you can deal with that sort of thing unless you can see it as it's

actually happening. That's why you want to stay in the present moment.

This is one of the reasons why we stay with the breath: so that it can stay in the moment. When you're with the breath, you know you're in the present moment. And if you work with the breath, you can make it comfortable and it becomes a good place to stay. You're not running off other places all the time.

This way you get to see what's going on. An intention comes up and you recognize, "Ah, this is an idea to do something." You can check it: Is this something you should follow or not? Over time, you get better and better at seeing which intentions are worth following and which ones are not.

So these are the good qualities you're developing in the mind. They build on the good qualities of generosity, they build on the good qualities of virtue, and strengthen them as well. When the mind is in good shape, then it's a lot easier to be generous. It's a lot easier to be virtuous—in other words, to avoid doing things that will harm yourself or harm other people.

So all these forms of goodness go together. But the really important one is the meditation, because everything comes out of the mind and meditation deals directly with the mind.

So make sure you take some time to meditate every day. Get your mind in good shape so that it can give good shape to your life.

At the same time, you give a better shape to the lives of the people around you. So this is a goodness that spreads around.