

## *The Right to Stop Suffering*

*July 4, 2016*

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out: each breath, one right after another. Don't go anywhere else. Just stay right here.

You have the choice, of course. If you don't want to stay here, you can go wander around. But that doesn't make any difference in your life, because we've been wandering around for who-knows-how-long. What makes a difference is when you choose to do something new, something more solid, something of greater value.

Like concentrating your mind right now: That's a good thing to do, because when the mind is concentrated, it sees things a lot more clearly. It begins to realize that it has the freedom to choose its objects.

This is a freedom we have that we tend not to take full advantage of. We tend to choose things that don't really benefit us in the long term. After a while, we're not even aware that we have choices. We just say, "There's no choice, you just do it." That's the mind lying to itself. You *do* have the choice. You can choose to be more generous. You can choose to be more virtuous. You can choose to get the mind more concentrated and to develop more discernment. These things are things that we are free to choose. We have the right and the ability.

The Buddha's teachings are among the few in the world that say you have the right and the ability to put an end to your suffering. Some others say that there's a Creator who created the world and has laws for you that you have to follow and you have to fit into that Creator's greater purpose.

But as the Buddha saw the world, it just keeps spinning around and around. It's not going anyplace in particular. Beings are going up and down, up and down in the cycle. It's like being in the cycle of a washing machine, getting thrown around. But we have the choice to get out, to pull ourselves out of that cycle.

And what is that cycle? It's the cycle of karma and defilement. You make a choice and then the results come back to you. If they come back well, then you want more of them. If they don't come back well, then you hate them. Then you create more karma based on those defilements. That's what keeps us spinning around.

It's time to choose to step out a bit. If you can't step out entirely, at least have a place where you can step out temporarily, as when you get the mind to settle down. You come to see that you have more freedom to choose what you want to think about, what you want to do, what you want to say. And you can choose to

create a better life for yourself: That's a freedom you have as well. And that's the freedom that means the most.

So take advantage of this freedom, this power of choice that we have, because if you choose wisely, it can take you far. If you choose not wisely, you just keep going around and around again—one more cycle in the washing machine spin—until you've decided it's time you've had enough and you want to step out. The sooner you step out, the better. The less suffering you create for yourself and the less you create for the people around you.

This freedom is one that does have responsibilities, because you realize that your actions do have an impact not only on yourself but also on other people. So you want to choose them well—both for their sake and for yours.