

## *Learning to Depend on Yourself*

*July 17, 2016*

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch the breath all the way in, all the way out. Keep with each breath as it's coming in, as it's going out. Try not to let any other thoughts invade your mind. If they do invade your mind, you don't have to follow them, you don't have to pay attention to them. Just stay right here. Hold onto the breath.

And see if you can make the breath comfortable. If it's too long or too short, you can adjust it. Too deep or too shallow, you can adjust it. Too heavy, too light, it's up to you to decide what kind of breathing feels good for you right now.

Watch carefully, because you have to learn how to depend on yourself as you're meditating. You've got the instructions from outside but you have to apply them inside and then figure out what's going to work for you.

This is a basic principle in the practice. We get the teachings from the Buddha, we depend on the Buddha and then his noble disciples to give us the teachings, to keep the memory teachings alive. But to get the most out of the teachings, we have to take them and put them into practice ourselves. We have to learn how to depend on ourselves.

Yesterday we had an ordination. As part of the ordination, the preceptor teaches the new monks some basic Dhamma. People sometimes wonder, "What is it that he teaches when nobody in the audience hears it?" So today I'll tell you what we taught.

It was all about learning how to depend on yourself. First, we take refuge in the Buddha and the Dhamma and the Sangha, as we chant every day. But what does that mean? It means that you look at their qualities and you take them as an example. In the case of the Buddha, he was a person of wisdom, purity, and compassion, so we want to develop those qualities within ourselves as well. After all, the qualities in him are not much of a refuge to us. We can hear about them, we see his good example, but if we don't take them inside, don't take that example and make it part of us, we can't really depend on it because we can't depend on ourselves. But if we *do* take these qualities inside, then we can depend on ourselves.

The same with the Dhamma: The Dhamma's there in the books, but you have to practice it so that you can get the results out of it. Once you've got the results, that's your genuine refuge.

And the same with the Sangha: we have their example. We can bow down to them, but just bowing down to them isn't enough. We have to bow down to them inside as well—in other words, really respect their qualities to the point where we want to develop them, too.

So you look at those good qualities. They had qualities of mindfulness: Once you've learned something good, you try to keep it in mind. Don't forget it. One of the ways in which we can destroy ourselves is by forgetting all the good things we've learned. We don't totally forget them but at the important junctures when we have to make decisions, have to make choices, sometimes we put what we've learned aside and say, "Right now it doesn't matter." That's when you've abandoned your mindfulness, you've abandoned your alertness, and you don't have any refuge anymore. The refuge is when you can remember,

“Okay, this is the right thing to do” *and* you carry it through.

That’s why the Buddha emphasized mindfulness when he was saying that you want to develop a refuge inside, because your mindfulness helps you keep things in mind and apply them when they’re useful, when the issues come up.

So as we’re entering the rains retreat in a couple of days, you might want to think about which of the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha you want to develop inside so you can become more of a refuge to yourself.

That kind of refuge is the refuge the Buddha really wanted us to develop. After all, he had to pass away 2,600 years ago. Someday the Dhamma’s going to die out, the noble sangha’s going to die out. If you really want to have something dependable, you have to develop their qualities within yourself.

So study their qualities and try to figure out which ones you find most inspiring or which ones you find most lacking in yourself that you really need help with. Listen to their instructions, look at their example, and see if you can follow their example all the way.

That way, you develop a refuge inside. In other words, you’re safe inside yourself. You can depend on yourself, that no matter what happens outside you can trust yourself to do the right thing, and can trust your mind to be in good shape all the time. That’s when you’re really safe.