

The Rains Retreat

July 20, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

Try to stay right here. No matter what comes up, you're going to stay with it.

But you're also going to use your tools to deal with it. You don't just sit on the receiving end. If something unskillful comes up, you figure out how to let it go. If something good comes up, you figure out how to maintain it.

This is what's good about staying here. You can apply skills to what's going on in your body and in your mind to catch negative things before they become large. If they're positive things, it's good to catch little things before they die so that you can nurture them. This way you get more in control of what's going on in your life.

So this is one of the good qualities of staying.

Today's the first day of the rains retreat. This is the day when the monks make a vow to stay here for three months, except for special duties they may have to follow someplace else, but they can go no longer than seven days at a time. They have to be back within seven days. During this time, it's a time for everyone to take on special practices to accelerate their practice. They're not thinking about traveling around now, they can think about just staying right here and looking at what's going on in their minds—and learning how to live with one another and hopefully help one another in our practice.

In Asia, this is the time when the rains start, which is a natural time for people to settle down. It's difficult to travel, it's a lot easier just to stay in one place. Which is why the Buddha had it set during the rains that the monks stopped and stayed in one place.

Here it's the opposite. The summer is the time when people want to go out and travel around. And it's the hottest time of the year at Wat Metta. But we can take this as a good lesson: There's lots of good we can do even when it's hot. It's so easy for the mind to say, "Well, today's too hot, I can't do this, I can't do that, I can't meditate, I can't do walking meditation." The question is, "Is it too hot to be with your breath? Is it too hot to let go of greed, aversion, and delusion?" And the answer always is No.

But the mind will make excuses. So this is a good time to practice cutting through those excuses. No matter how hot it is, it's still possible to do good things in the mind. There are a few things that the heat does prevent but there are lots of things that the heat just leaves wide open in terms of the goodness we can do.

So learn to overcome that voice in the mind that's constantly coming up with

excuses: “It’s too hot. It’s too cold. It’s too early. It’s too late. I’m too tired.”
Whatever. Learn not to let those voices get in the way.

You’ve got some good that you want to develop, so don’t let these little obstacles stand in the way of that goodness.

And where does it start? It starts right here. Each time the mind moves, ask yourself, “Why is it moving? Why is it going *there*? Why is it focusing on this? Why is it wanting to do that?” In some cases, the reasons will be good, and others not. So you want to be able to sort that out. And the best way to do that is just to stay in place.

Watch what’s going on and see how causes are connected to results and how results are connected to causes—and learning which causes you want to encourage and which ones you want to do away with. That’s one of the advantages of staying in place: This is where you see these things clearly.