

## *The Perfection of Virtue*

*July 31, 2016*

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

Try to be solidly with the breath all the way in, all the way out. Don't go flitting around, thinking about this, that, and the other thing. Each time the breath comes in, you want to be right here. You want to stay with it right here. Think of your awareness as just settling in and sitting right here.

This quality of solidity relates to several aspects of the path. The word for virtue in Pali, *sila*, is very close to the word for rock, which is *sela*. So make your virtues like rock. Once you make up your mind you're going to follow a precept, you follow it solidly. You don't start making excuses for this or that.

As the Buddha said, a loss of your virtue is much more serious than loss of wealth, even loss of your relatives, loss of your health. Because those things don't drag you down as much as the loss of virtue does. Loss of virtue in this lifetime makes life more and more difficult. When you go and get reborn in line with your actions that are not virtuous, you get into even more trouble.

One of the chants we have is, "May I look after myself with ease.." People who are not virtuous are not going to look after themselves with ease. They're going to have lots of difficulties. If they kill then there will be lots of short lives and lots of illnesses. If you steal, your things get taken away from you. If you have illicit sex, you have problems in your relationships. If you lie, then you never get to hear the truth—or you won't recognize the truth when you hear it. You'll hold everyone in suspicion. These actions come back at you.

So you want to make sure that the actions you're broadcasting in the world are things that you'd like to have come back to you. Otherwise, you find yourself having lot of trouble just taking care of yourself.

Last night I saw a squirrel with two crippled legs, lying on its side, struggling to get across the road. I went near to see what was wrong with it, and of course it started struggling all the more to get away from me. I realized that here was somebody I couldn't help. It's really sad to see that. There was no one to help the squirrel, and the squirrel's not ready to receive help from anybody. That comes from a lack of virtue someplace in the background. It's hard enough being a squirrel but it's even harder when you're crippled.

So when you think about how your actions have results, you want to make sure you don't do anything that's going to put you in a position where you have trouble looking after yourself with ease.

Now virtue is both a matter of the precepts and also a matter of your manners. In other words, there are the things that you make a vow not to do and then, in terms of your manners, the things that you do to try to develop within yourself. The manners include living together well with the community, being helpful to the community, sharing the burdens of the community so that everybody feels that we're all in this together. That's a part of virtue as well.

So look both at the things that are prohibited and also at the things that are encouraged in a virtuous life, the ways you help other people, by doing your duties around the community, in your family, in your work, in society. This way we live together and there's a sense that we're helping one another along. That gives a sense of solidity to our lives.

You want to make sure that with the precepts you won't make any exceptions at all. No killing, period. That means you're going to have to start thinking about: What about those termites in the house? What about the ants? What are you going to do with those? There are ways of dealing with them without killing them.

All too often we think when pests are troublesome, you just kill them. But if you make up your mind you're not going to do that anymore, you've got to figure out how you're going to deal with difficult situations and still not break the precepts. That develops your discernment.

So it's in this way that virtue, concentration, and discernment all come together. This quality of solidity of the mind trains you in all kinds of good things. So try to be solid in your goodness. Don't let other things chip away at it.

Then the goodness you create will come back to you as a solid goodness that you can really enjoy, that really does make you happy and allows you to look after yourself with ease, now and on into the future.