

Step Back from Craziness

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The Pali word for meditation, *bhavana*, means to develop. We're trying to develop good qualities inside.

For instance, right now we're focused on the breath. It may not seem like much, just looking at your breath. But to stay with the breath requires mindfulness, that you keep it in mind; it requires alertness, that you watch what you're doing; and ardency, you need to want to do it well.

If you don't do it well, it's just one more thing that the mind thinks about for a little bit and then wanders off. To do it well means you really stick with it. As soon as the mind wanders off, you bring it right back. It wanders off again, you just drop whatever the thought is and you'll be right back at the breath.

You have to be insistent with yourself, because otherwise the mind's old habits take over, and nothing changes. If you want an improvement in your life, you have to improve the habits of your mind.

So keep coming back, coming back. As for other issues and things, just let them go, let them go. They're not the main issue right now. The main issue is that the mind is causing itself unnecessary stress and suffering, which accomplishes no purpose at all. Sometimes it spills out onto other people as well.

So we want to focus on this as *the* number one issue. How's the mind driving itself crazy? What is it telling itself? Well, you don't have to listen to it, just keep coming back to the breath. As you do, you begin to develop the ability to step back from your thoughts, so that they don't take over. You're more in charge. You can see what the mind is thinking, so you can decide whether you want to go with it or not.

You learn to say No when it's going off in an unskillful direction. But not just No: You also say Yes to the concentration, Yes to your ability to stay still in one place.

When you're still in one place, it's not as if you're here just empty with nothing at all. You're here with a sense of ease that comes as you're able to settle in, settle down. The mind may not be used to this, because it's used to running around. But once it gets a taste for its ability to settle down, then it begins to realize: This is what you've been looking for all along, a peaceful sense of ease, well-being. It's more lasting than a lot of the other things out in the world. So focus on developing this.

So in simply staying with the breath, you're developing all kinds of good

qualities that will then carry over into the rest of your life.

So focus on this. This is your work as you're meditating, to keep coming back. Have a sense that the breath is comfortable. If the breath is not comfortable, you can change it.

One of the nice things about the breath is that it responds to your thoughts. If you think "longer breathing," it'll get longer; if you think "shorter," it'll get shorter.

So think about the breath in a way that gives rise to a sense of ease and well-being right here. Then, as you leave the meditation, see how long you can maintain that sense of ease. There's no need for the mind to add unnecessary stress to itself. We can begin to realize that even just the way we breathe can be stressful. So learn how to do it with a minimum of stress.

That teaches us lessons also about how we can work with the mind so that it's not causing itself so much stress and suffering.

Once you've solved that problem, that's the problem that needs to be solved. Everything else you either realize was not a problem to begin with, or it doesn't really matter, or it's easy to see through. So focus on this as the main issue you've got to solve: Why is the mind making itself suffer? Why is it adding unnecessary stress on itself? See what you can do to relieve that, to change the habits of the mind.

That's what it means to develop the mind in the right direction.