

Appropriate Attention

October 7, 2016

Pay attention to the breath coming in, and pay attention to it going out. Then you have to pay attention again. Keep at it.

The kind of attention you're applying here is not bare attention. It's called appropriate attention. You notice what's happening but you also realize that there are some duties you have once you recognize what's happening. That's what makes the attention appropriate.

In other words, you pay attention to the breath to see: Is it comfortable right now? Is it a good place for the mind to settle down? Is it helping you get into concentration? Or should you change the breath to make it more amenable? There's work to be done.

Mindfulness is what stitches those moments of attention together. Each bit of attention is a very short moment, and then it's easy to forget. But if you have mindfulness to remember—and that's what mindfulness means, it means keeping something in mind—you're keeping in mind that you want to stay here and you're trying to get the mind to settle down. That always has to be in the back of the mind and has to be directing your attention as you connect those little acts of attention together.

It's in this way that they're actually able to accomplish those duties. The duty of comprehending suffering, abandoning the cause, and developing the path, so that you can realize the cessation of suffering. They're duties that no one's imposing on you, but if you want to put an end to suffering, this is what you've got to do. This is the nature of the beast. If you're going to understand suffering, you've got to work on developing the causes of the path.

So that's what we do. We're trying to get the mind into a good state of concentration here. If it wanders off, you know what to do: You bring it back. The important thing is that you pay attention to what's happening so that you can know in time: "This is how it wanders off, this is why it wanders off, this is how I can get it back." And then you keep on top of it.

It's in that way that your attention becomes more and more appropriate. It really does take you where you want to go. We do have a goal here. We want the mind to settle down so that we can put an end to suffering.

So work on the step right in front of you. It may seem like a long journey but as they always say, "Every journey starts with one step." And it consists of single steps: one, one, one after another. So make sure you stick with the step that you've

got to do right now. Pay attention that you're placing your steps in the right direction.