

Motivated by Example

November 14, 2016

As you sit down to meditate, it's good to remember that you're part of a long line of people stretching all the way back to the Buddha. We owe the fact that his teachings are still alive not only to the Buddha but also to the people who've kept them alive through the practice. So take heart in the fact that you're part of a good lineage, the lineage of people who want to find a harmless way to put an end to their suffering. And a true way: It turns out that the harmless way is also the best way.

So when your practice seems to be falling back or doesn't seem to be making any progress, remember at the very least you're part of a good lineage. And try to take some energy from that.

Think back on the members of the Sangha who've had lots of trouble in their practice. Some of them almost committed suicide and yet they were able to turn themselves around. Whatever your problems, they're nothing compared to theirs.

And then you compare your problems to the problems the Buddha had. The Buddha had a conviction that there was a way out but he didn't really know. He didn't have any examples. He made himself exemplary. But now we have his example and we have the example of all the men and women who followed his path.

So take heart from that. Let it give you energy and give you inspiration. One of the ways of motivating yourself in the path is to think back on all the good qualities that the Buddha taught and on the people who exemplified those qualities. Make that your motivation to keep on practicing.

Because this is a good path, it's a noble path: noble not only in the sense that it leads to a noble attainment, but also in the qualities of mind you develop along the way. The things you do along the way are all noble as well.

So find ways to give yourself encouragement and give yourself the desire to keep on practicing. Because as the Buddha said, desire lies at the heart of right effort. It's simply a question of making your desire right and focusing it on the right place.

If your desires are wrong, they cause suffering. Or if your desires are focused only on the goal and not on what you have to do, then you're not going to get there. You have to focus on what needs to be done right now and make yourself *want* to do what needs to be done right now. And think in whatever ways will give rise to that desire. In that way, you give a good direction to your life.