

## *Direct Your Life*

*January 8, 2017*

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out. See if you can keep your mind with the breath continually.

Any other thoughts that come in, just ignore them. They may be there but you don't have to pay attention to them. They're like a conversation on the other side of the room. It doesn't really concern you, so just let it be. You don't have to go and stop the other people from talking. You just focus on your work at hand, which is to get the mind under your control.

As the Buddha said, one of the blessings of life, or one of the ways you protect yourself in life, is to direct your life in the right direction. Notice: That means that *you* direct your life. You don't let other people direct your life. You try to look and see what is really for your own long-term welfare and happiness and what you can do in that direction. Then you look at other things that you might be doing that would pull you away from that direction, and you have to ask yourself, "Okay, where do I want to go? Do I just want to muck around in the way I've been living or do I want to give my life a direction?"

After all, life has its own direction, of course: You get born and then you grow up and then you get old and you get ill and then you die. That's the direction of the body. But the mind doesn't have to follow that direction. The mind can have its own directions. But you have to be careful about which direction you choose.

As the Buddha said, there are lots of different paths in the world. There are paths that lead to true happiness; there are paths that lead to a lot of suffering. All too often, if we don't look carefully, we get on the wrong path.

So you have to look for the signs. Is your mind more under control? Are you less likely to flare up in anger or greed, aversion or delusion? That's a sign you're on the right path. However, if you're lazy about doing anything, that's the wrong path. You have to have a path that points you the right direction. That's why we need directions on the path, so that we have a sense of where we're going. If we decide we don't like the goal that our particular actions are leading to, we can change. But you're the one who has to set the direction.

After all, when the Buddha was teaching, he didn't set himself up as a god. He didn't say, "I created you, therefore you have to obey me." He simply said, "Look, I've practiced this practice, I've seen all these different paths and where they go, and this is the best path to follow: the path of generosity, virtue, and meditation." It's up to you to decide whether you want to follow his directions. If you do, then

he's got a lot to tell you: about how to think about generosity, how to think about virtue, how to practice the meditation so that you get the most out of it. So you look to his directions to give guidance to your own self direction—because ultimately you're the one who makes the decision.

So remember that our actions are leading someplace. We're all on a path leading someplace or another. You've got to make sure you're on the right path. When you're on the right path, you protect yourself from a lot of the dangers that would come from the other ones.

The Buddha compares the paths to suffering to paths that lead to a big, burning charcoal pit or to a big cesspool. Nobody wants to go to a charcoal pit or a cesspool, but a lot of times our actions lead in that direction. Especially when you give in to a lot of anger or a lot of greed. You think you're gaining things but you're actually losing a lot. And you set yourself up for some pretty bad suffering down the line.

Other paths, the Buddha said, are like going to a nice lake with shady trees: clean water in the lake, thick shade under the trees, a nice place where you can swim around, drink your fill, and rest under the shade of the trees. Those paths exist, too.

So try to choose the path that goes in the right direction, because you're the one who makes the choice. Then you're the one who's going to live with the results of that choice. So make sure you choose well.