

Shaping the Present

May 15, 2017

Close your eyes and stay with the breath.

They talk about people studying meditation with Ajaan Sao and asking him, “When I do this, what’s going to happen?” He would say, “Don’t ask. Just do it.” “How long will it take?” He would say, “Don’t ask. Just do it.”

In other words, you’ve got to learn how to be patient and to stick with the causes. All too often we have our eye on the results down at the end of the path, wondering, “When are we going to get there?” Well, it’s by following the path that you get there. And how do you follow the path? Watch this step and then the next step and you focus on the steps that you’re doing to make sure that you don’t wander off the path, don’t step in the wrong places.

As for how long it’s going to take, you have to remember that time is nothing that we experience directly. People look back on their lives and they see it’s just passed in an instant. Well, it didn’t pass in an instant, there were lots of instances. But at that moment, it’s just an instance. So don’t let the amount of time it’s going to take weigh you down.

The stuff that’s past is past. Don’t gather it up. Ajaan Lee’s image is of someone who’s trying to plow a field with his water buffalo. He sticks a bag on the water buffalo’s leg to gather up all the dirt as it falls off the plow. Of course, the water buffalo’s not going to get anywhere that way. What’s past is past. And what’s future it’s going to happen on its own. You don’t have to anticipate it. What you have to do is just make sure that the present moment is well-shaped, well-formed.

We do play a role in shaping the present moment. We have the raw material coming in from our past karma, but what we actually experience right now has a lot to do with how we shape things. So as we meditate, we’re learning how to shape it well. You shape it well and then you let it go, then you shape the next moment and then shape the next moment, letting go of each one as soon as it’s done.

What keeps you going is, on the one hand, this sense of conviction that this is a really good path. It’s a path that depends on your strengths and on your abilities. You don’t have to hope for someone else to be nice enough to come along and do it for you. You learn how to depend on yourself. And as you follow the path, you do become more dependable.

Also, it’s a path that asks you to do only good things—not like the paths of the world that sometimes say, “Well, you’ve got to cut corners here and you have to be a little dishonest there.” This is all about being honest and being straightforward, and being as good as you can in the truest sense of that word. So it’s a good path to be on.

So don’t ask yourself, “How much longer is it going to be?” Time will take care of itself. What you have to take care of is this moment right now. Make sure that you shape it well.

