

Something to Hold On To

August 1, 2017

Settle in with the breath. And everything else around you, you can just let go. Even other things in the body: There's going to be warmth in the body, coolness in the body, solidity. For the time being, just put it all aside. Just think, "Breath, breath, breath."

We have to learn how to keep our minds on one thing, because otherwise they go straying out and can cause all kinds of trouble. It's like a student I had one time. He was out camping with a dog. The dog went straying around. All of a sudden the dog came running back to the camp and kept running past—and there was a bear right behind the dog. My student realized that he shouldn't have brought the dog along. And it's the same with our thoughts: They go straying around and they bring back trouble if we're not careful.

So you have to have a place where it's safe to stay and you're not going to be influenced by the thoughts. Some of the thoughts we think are of things that we intend to think, and others are just random stuff that comes out from our past karma, and you have no idea what that's going to include. So you have to have a safe place where you're not pulled away by these things, or they don't pull bad things into you.

So make up your mind you're going to stay with the breath and try to get as interested in the breath as you can. That helps you to stay here with a sense of firmness and a sense of wanting to be here. Think of all the things the breath can do in the body. The breath energy can flow all kinds of places: around the nerves, around the blood vessels, down through the muscles, through all the organs of the body. Think of it refreshing the entire body as it comes in, goes out. In that way you can follow it throughout.

As you follow it, you find that other things will come up, but you can just let them fall away, fall away. As long as you have something good to hold on to, you don't have to go on grabbing at those. Most of us are at sea, and anything that comes by we just grab right onto it – good, bad, indifferent. You want to find something good to hold on to, something that you know will float and will take you to safety.

The breath is one of those things, so learn how to get interested in it and learn how to follow it as consistently as you can for as long as you can. This is a skill that will come in handy as aging approaches, as illness comes, even as death approaches. You're going to find the mind jumping all over the place, your thoughts will jump all over the place, but you don't have to jump after them if you've got a good place to stay.

The breath teaches you that this is one thing you've got to hold on to. It leads right back to your present awareness, and your present awareness is where you're really safe. After all, at death the breath will leave you, but you'll still have your awareness. So make sure that it doesn't get pulled out to places it shouldn't go. And learn to teach it good habits from right now.

