

## *Generosity*

*September 3, 2017*

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Make up your mind you're going to stay here. Make the breath comfortable, too. You can try different ways of breathing—short, long; fast, slow; heavy, light; deep, shallow—to see what feels best for the body right now. Notice also that the needs of the body may change, so be on top of that. Long breathing may feel good for a while and then after a while not so good. Heavy breathing may feel good for a while, and after a while it gets too heavy. So be willing to make adjustments and be on top of what's needed to be done.

There are so many things in the world that we can't control, but the mind is something we can learn how to control. Think about the weather last night. No matter how much you may have wanted the temperature to go down, it just was refusing to go down. Today who knows what's going to happen. There are a lot of things in life that are outside of our control.

The problem is that for many of us, our minds are outside of our control as well. A thought comes in and just takes over without our stopping to think, "Is this really for our true benefit or not?" We end up doing things, saying things, thinking things that actually are for our own detriment—which doesn't make any sense. It's because we're not paying attention. We don't understand.

Also, our powers of mindfulness and alertness are really weak. Mindfulness is the ability to keep something in mind. Alertness is the ability to watch what you're doing while you're doing it and noticing what the results are. These may be weak, but they can be developed.

That's what we're doing as we meditate: learning to be more mindful. As soon as the mind begins to slip off the breath, you remember that that's not what it's supposed to be doing right now and you bring it back. Of course, you have to be alert to watch for this. And there's another quality you need, ardency, where you try to do this well.

You find that as you get better and better at this exercise, then you can start applying the same principles to your other actions as you go through life, looking for what really will lead to true happiness. As I said, there are a lot of things you can't change, a lot of things that you have no control over, but you can decide that you want to be virtuous, you can decide you want to be generous. You can decide that you want to get the mind under your control. The Buddha doesn't force you to do this, but as he points out, these are wise ways of acting.

When your mind is more under your control, you find that you actually like being generous, you like being virtuous, you like meditating. You realize, for example with generosity, that the happiness in generosity is not just the hope of getting something back. The mind feels really good as you give a gift. And that good feeling is something that carries over. You realize that you're not poor, you're not in a situation where you have nothing to share.

As the Buddha said, if you could realize the results that come from giving, you wouldn't eat without having shared some of the food. Even if it were your last meal and there was somebody there to share it with, you'd still share it, because you realize that the results would be really good.

As they say, having wealth is one of the rewards of generosity in this life, but so is the good state of mind you're in right now. Because where else do you live? You live in your mind. If you create a narrow, constricted, selfish mind, then it's not a really good place to stay. You feel constrained. Hemmed in. Everywhere you look, there's not enough. But if you learn to see, "Well, I can share this, I can share that, I can do without this and do without that for the sake of being able to give"—this is not only in terms of material things but also with your knowledge, your time, your forgiveness—the mind feels really good. It becomes a more spacious mind. You realize that that was something you had under your control all the time: the ability basically to add extra rooms to your mind, to expand the square footage inside so your mind does become a much more pleasant place to be.

At the same time, the conversation that goes on in a generous mind is a much gentler conversation, a much happier conversation. You're used to talking to yourself about "Where can I give?" That's a much happier conversation than the one that begins, "I'm hungry. What can I take?"

At the same time, you realize that whatever you give you're going to get back something at least. Make sure that it's good.

As the Buddha said, there are many different motivations for giving. You can give simply because you want to get that thing back with interest, but that's the lowest motivation for giving. The higher ones are giving because it just feels good for the mind, or you're carrying on a good tradition from your family. Finally, giving becomes a natural expression of the state of the mind that you have going all the time. It's not grasping and holding things tight all the time. You're willing to be generous, you're willing to share. And that's a much better state of mind.

You have that under your control. You're able to do this. There are so many things in the world that you can't change, but you can change your mind. Learn how to change it well.