

A Life with Direction

September 22, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out. Give the mind a good solid place to stay.

We live in a world where things are pushing us around. And we want to make sure that we have a solid place to stay when they're pushing us in a bad direction so that we don't have to go along with the pressure.

The breath is a good place to stay to serve that purpose. It's with you all the time: Wherever you are, the breath is right there. You can breathe in ways that are comfortable, breathe in ways that are soothing to the body, soothing to the mind—energizing when you need energy, relaxing when you need to be relaxed—so that you can make it a good place to stay.

It's like moving into a house and turning it into your home. Even when storms come, you've got a good solid house—the roof is solid, the windows are solid and well-sealed— and you just stay in your safe place. When things outside are safe, then you can come outside again, always knowing that when things get bad again, you've got a good place to go.

The texts say that the causes for progress in life are four. Two of them have to do with your past lifetime: you've got merit from the past and you've also been born into a place where you can practice.

But the other two causes are things you have to do now. One is learning to choose good people as friends, people who lead you in the right direction: the direction of conviction, virtue, generosity, wisdom.

And the other one is to establish your mind in the right direction or to establish yourself in the right direction. After all, as we're born into this life, there's nobody that tells us what we have to do with our lives. We're born here because we wanted to be here. But now that we've got this human life, what are you going to do with it? It's up to you to decide whether you want to make it go in the right direction or not.

There are lots of wrong directions out there: directions that involve unvirtuous behavior, ungenerous behavior, foolish behavior. There's a lot of that out there. And people say that you'll be happy by doing these things, but if you look carefully you realize it's not the case.

So you want to look for a happiness that's more solid and more secure: one that doesn't harm anybody and a happiness that more than repays the effort you put into it. That comes from being virtuous, being generous, and learning how to meditate, to give the mind a good solid place to stay where it can see things for what they really are.

So when you point your life in this direction and then you stick with it, then it's going to go in that direction. We may meet up with obstacles, but that's part of life. But the direction's one that you determine. So make sure you aim your mind, aim yourself in the right direction.

Otherwise, you just get pushed around like dust motes in the air: They go zig, zag, zig, zag, zig, zag, and never really go anywhere in particular. That's not the kind of life we want. We want a life that goes in a good direction, so that at the end of life we can say we chose the right path and it's delivered us to where we want to go.

So it's a choice that we make. So choose well, aim yourself in the right direction. You'll find that you benefit, and the people around you benefit as well.