

Immediate Gratification

December 26, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Stay with the breath as consistently as you can, and try to fend off any other thoughts that would pull you in other directions. You have to put up some resistance.

This is that time of year when germs are floating around. But the germs of physical disease are nothing compared to the germs of greed, aversion, and delusion. You've got to put up some resistance to those. Because those don't come just from outside, they come from inside.

Sometimes we blame things outside. It was because something was pretty that you wanted it, or because somebody had misbehaved that you got angry at them. But actually the mind is out looking for things to get worked up about in general. It wants to be angry about something, it wants to be desiring something, it wants to be afraid of something, so it'll latch onto anything, and then build it into more than it has to be. You have to learn how to put up some resistance to that.

That's what mindfulness is for, is to remind you, that these things are not your friends. These things are not entertainment that comes without a cost. There may be some entertainment there—in that people like playing with their anger, like playing with their fear, like playing with their greed or their lust—but then there's a big cost down the line. You have to keep that in mind. Without keeping that in mind you just fall for whatever: whatever comes up, whatever comes by, whatever comes out of the mind, whatever comes in.

It's our ability to remember lessons from the past that protects us. Because we remember from the past also to look to the future: that immediate gratification is not what life is all about. We're here for long-term happiness.

That's the mark of wisdom, when you want to find out what you need to do in order to find long-term welfare and happiness. The wisdom here is realizing, one, there is such a thing as long-term, and two, that it comes from your actions, and three, that it's a lot more important than immediate gratification.

But you have to keep that in mind all the time. Otherwise, the mind just goes for whatever comes past. So remember to use your mindfulness to protect you. As the Buddha said, it's when you're established in mindfulness that the mind has a refuge, a safe place to stay inside, because it has knowledge of what to do with whatever comes up. That's your protection. That's your refuge.

That way, whatever germs of these defilements come into the mind, you can show some resistance. You don't have to give into them at the first glance. And over the long term you'll be happy that you did show that resistance. So try to keep it strong.

