

Where Happiness Comes From

December 28, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. When the breath comes in, watch it coming in; when it goes out, watch it going out. All the way in, all the way out. Try to stay consistently with it.

We come here to make merit, in other words, to create goodness in our lives. So you want to make sure that your goodness is complete. We've made a gift. As we're sitting here, we're not breaking any of the precepts. What remains is the mind: The mind has to be brought into good shape, because otherwise it wanders all over the place. It's like a little dog that wanders around and comes back dragging who-knows-what and it rolls around in it for a while. So you want to make sure that it's trained. Otherwise, it creates a lot of messes for its owner. But if the mind is well-trained, it can do all kinds of things for you, many more than a dog or a horse or any animal could ever do. The well-trained mind can bring you true happiness.

This is why the Buddha said true happiness comes not from having pleasant things but from having a trained mind. So if you're looking for happiness, this is where you look for it, by making sure the mind does what you want it to do.

So give it something good to do right now. Have it stay with the breath. Make the breath comfortable so that it feels good inside: relaxes you as you breathe in, soothes you as you breathe out. If you're feeling tired, what kind of breathing will energize you right now? The breath can do all kinds of things for the body and all kinds of things for the mind. As you take an interest in it, you find that your interest in other things falls away. You realize that a lot of your well-being depends simply on how you breathe and the consistency with which the mind can stay with one object.

As the Buddha once said, there's no happiness aside from peace, which means the mind able to stay with something continually. We can get little bits and snippets of pleasure every now and then from things that are not very peaceful. But for the peace to go deep in the mind, for the happiness to go deep in the mind, it needs a sense of long-term peace, it needs a sense of stability inside.

So try to be stable here with the breath. Learn how to trust yourself, so that you can depend on yourself that once you choose to focus on something, you can stay there. You can remember to stay there and you're alert to watch out for the mind and you really put an effort in. These three qualities of remembering, i.e., mindfulness; alertness; and ardency, to really try to do this well: These are the qualities what create a refuge in the mind, a place where it really can find happiness.

So when we're wishing happiness for the new year, happiness for birthdays, happiness for whatever, what it comes down to is: Can you train your mind? Nice things are nice, but real

happiness comes from inside. So make sure that you've got the inner resources, you've got the inner aspect of happiness down.

As for the rest of the world, it'll come and go. When good things come, you appreciate them, you try to get good use out of them; when bad things come, you try to get good use out of them, too. After all, the world has gain and loss; status, loss of status; praise and criticism; pleasure and pain. That's what the world has to offer you. If you can learn how to take advantage of all these things, then you can live in the world and not suffer.

In other words, even when there's loss, you can think about how when there's loss, you find out who your true friends are. When there's loss of status, it's the same sort of thing.

When there's criticism, you look around and see, "Is the criticism true?" And you've learned something special. Because all too often we don't look at our own faults, but if someone else actually points them out and they are true, then we've learned something important. If the criticism is false, you've learned something about the other person.

So there's always something to learn from both the good and the bad in the world. If you can take this attitude, then the happiness that you create inside the mind will be stable and won't turn into something else.