

Perfection in an Imperfect World

January 5, 2018

Close your eyes and find your breath. When you breathe in, where do you feel it? Try to keep your attention focused right there.

As for other conversations going on in the mind, just let them pass, pass, pass. You don't have to stop them just yet. They'll stop eventually on their own if you don't pay them any attention. It's your running out after them that gives them more reality than they need to have. Stay right here with the breath. Let them be in the background.

This is the way it is: We live in a world that's imperfect, but we have to learn how to train our minds in the midst of an imperfect world. We can't wait for everything to be just right, just the way we want it, before we can settle down. You have to learn how to settle down in spite of everything else that's going on. So let the rest of the world go its way.

This is what equanimity is all about. It doesn't mean that you don't care about anything at all. It means you care about some things but you realize that if you spread your concern around too far and too thinly, then the things you really care about are not going to get done. And the things you should care about are, number one, the state of your mind, what's going on in your mind right now. When you tell the mind to do something, will it do it? Or will it start undermining what it really wants to do by thinking of other things?

So care about staying with the breath. Care about making the breath comfortable. The more comfortable you can make the breath, the easier it'll be to stay with it. Think of breath energy suffusing throughout the body, bathing the body on all sides, and you're sitting here in the midst of a comfortable energy. As for any pains that may be in the body, just let them be.

Again, we're not waiting for perfection before we start. We're trying to perfect our minds in an imperfect world. And even though the mind may not seem perfect yet, when it's mindful, when it's alert, when it really tries to focus on things that are of value, that's when it's approaching perfection, improving itself.

This is something we have to do every day, every day. Otherwise, the values of the world come in and wash over us, making us forget what's really important in life. This is one of the reasons why we bow down so much here at the monastery, to remind ourselves of what's really worthy of respect. We respect the Buddha because he taught us to respect things that are worthy of respect inside us and also in other people. The desire for true happiness is something that we want to respect. Don't let the world tell you otherwise.

So in the midst of a world that's kind of crazy, try to maintain your sanity, focused on things that are of real value, things that lead to a long-term happiness: a happiness that's solid, a happiness that's blameless and doesn't harm anybody. A happiness that can come about by learning how to train the mind.

