

Nourishing Memories

March 25, 2018

Close your eyes and watch your breathing. When the breath comes in, know it's coming in. When it goes out, know that it's going out. That's all you have to know right now. Focus on doing this one thing.

As for other thoughts that come into the mind, you can just brush them away. In fact, the less attention you pay to them, the better. Think of them as little fish nibbling at the edges of your concentration, but they can't come in and eat up the heart. If you let them come in, then you really have to chase them out. But otherwise, just let them nibble a bit and after a while they'll go away.

You're trying to do something good here. You're trying to get the mind to settle down and have one object, to stay in that one object. In other words, you want to get the mind under your control. All too often, we act on our moods. A mood comes in and it seems so strong, so real, that you just can't say No to it. If we lived our lives like that with other people, just letting whoever comes in with a strong emotion run the place, we'd be in really bad shape. Yet that's how we let our minds run themselves. Emotions take over, and we do things and afterwards we regret them, but then the emotion comes again and we do it again. You've got to learn how to say No to some things, and say Yes to the things that are good in the mind.

When you look at your life, what are the good things that you can look back on? Sometimes you look back on good memories: You had fun here and you had a good time there. But that kind of memory is like candy that tastes good but doesn't really give much nourishment. The real nourishment is when you can think of the good things you've done, in the sense of being generous; in observing the precepts, in other words, having principles in your actions; and times when you've got the mind to be really still and have a strong sense of contentment inside. Those kinds of things have a long-lasting impact, and they're nourishment for the mind.

All too often, we spend our lives running around trying to collect memories, but then our faculty of memory starts going, as all the good memories that we kept about the good fun times we had just slip out through the holes in our memory. But the good that you've done, that doesn't have to depend on your being able to remember it or not. It becomes a good habit in the mind, a good way of acting, a good way of thinking. Those things stay with you.

They say that people who have memory problems as they get older don't change their personalities that much. They may forget things, they may forget people, but their basic personality stays pretty much the same. The habits they've developed, that's what carries them through.

So you have to develop the habit of learning how to be content with the things around you, and having to have a strong sense you would never want to harm anyone, that you want to be as helpful as you can when you have the opportunity. Those kind of habits stay, and those are the things you can really depend on.

So make sure that you build things inside that are really dependable. As for the good things in life, think of them simply as decorations, whereas the real heart of your life is the good that you do.

When you have an opportunity to be generous, see it as an opportunity to add some goodness to your heart. When you're tempted to break any of the precepts and you say No on principle, that adds to the goodness of your heart. As you sit down and get the mind to be calm and to stay with one object so that it can see itself more clearly: That adds a lot to the goodness of your heart.

Stock up on goodness more than you stock up on pleasant memories. Because this kind of goodness is nourishment, whether you remember it or not. But the good habit is there.