

Ardent Concentration

July 17, 2018

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Nobody else can watch it for you. This is something you've got to do yourself. And you have to give it your full attention. Think of yourself as building a home for the mind. If you do a sloppy job, the home is not going to be a good place to stay. So pay careful attention to each breath as it comes in, each breath as it goes out.

Pay careful attention to your mind. Where is your mind going right now? Because as the Buddha said, everything we experience is led by the mind, shaped by the mind, and the mind can shape things in all kinds of forms. It can create a lot of suffering for ourselves and other people, or it can create a lot of happiness. So we've got to keep watch on it. If you want to make it reliable, you have to be very mindful. You have to be mindful to the point where the mind settles down and is really still.

And who's going to do the work? Well, you have to do the work. Who's going to check the work? You have to check the work, to see whether it's creating suffering or not. All too often we just let things slide. There's a part of the mind that says, "Well, if I don't take care of it, maybe someone else will." This may happen with things outside, but not with the mind. If you want the mind to be clean, you've got to clean it. If you want the mind to be stable, you've got to stabilize it. You can't go running around asking somebody else to do it for you. Other people can give you advice on how to do it, but the real work is yours right here.

This is why the Buddha said arduousness is an important part of mindfulness practice. It's what gets the mind into concentration. You try to pay careful attention to what you're doing and try to do it really well, and be very demanding in how you judge the results. As the Buddha said, the secret to his awakening was that he didn't rest content with the goodness he had done. If there was any way he could improve it, that's what he would do. If we're to find true happiness, we have to take him as our example, this is how it's done.

It's in this way that you build a home for yourself, or as the Buddha says, you build an island for yourself, you build a refuge for yourself. Once you've done that, it's a refuge that nobody can take away. If you're dependent on the help of others, other people can sometimes take that help away. But when you've built your own refuge, it's yours. Nobody else can touch it. Nothing else can destroy it.

Our problem is that *we* tend to destroy our refuge. We get the mind into good shape and then we forget and go running out after other things. Then we suffer and we wonder why. Well, there's no need to wonder. We haven't been taking good care of ourselves. We haven't been doing our work properly.

So here we have the Buddha's teachings already all laid out. It's simply a matter of whether you're going to take them and make them your own. Nobody else can do the work, and if you don't do it now, when is it going to get done? Things don't get easier as you get older. So right now is the best time to ardently give yourself to the breath, give yourself to developing mindfulness and concentration. When you do that, then they'll give you rewards many times over.