

The Blessing of Self-direction

August 4, 2018

Close your eyes and direct your attention to the breath. Keep it in that direction. As for the sound of the crows, the sound of the hummingbirds, the noise off in the distance of whatever, just let that go right through. Don't direct your mind there.

It's important you have a clear idea of where to pay attention. When the Buddha talks about being alert, it's not just being alert to whatever is happening in the present moment. You specifically want to be alert to what you're doing and the results that you're getting from what you're doing.

Right now you're trying to focus on the breath, so make sure you're alert to the breath and to the mind that's trying to be focused. Don't let anything else get in the way. Just be with the breath, all the way in, all the way out.

This factor of direction is important. There's a passage where the Buddha talks about three types of blessings in your life: One is that you're born in a civilized country, and two, you've made merit in the past. Those are things that basically come from your past actions. Then the third blessing is that you have directed yourself properly, you're properly self-directed, *atta sammapaniddhi ca*. In other words, you make up your mind: Now that you've got all the advantages that come from having merit in the past and living in a civilized country, what are you going to do with that? Where do you want your life to go? The direction is up to you. Otherwise you just follow the stream of whatever, and who knows where those streams are coming from?

Because in addition to past merit, you've also probably got some past bad actions, and who knows which stream will push you in which direction? If you're just sitting there passively accepting whatever's coming along, who knows where the stream is going to push you? But if you make up your mind, "I've got this merit in the past, I want to use it in the right direction," you're taking a fund that you've created from the past and you're making good use of it.

As the Buddha said, the universe as a whole doesn't have any particular purpose. It just keeps going around and around and around. It's up to you to give your life purpose and to find purpose in this purposeless universe. So give yourself a good purpose; Think about what it would be to find a happiness that doesn't have any drawbacks, doesn't cause any harm to anybody at all. That way you find your happiness, and you don't get in the way of anybody's else's happiness. That's a good goal. If you want to direct yourself in that direction, then direct your thoughts to the breath right now. Because it's in developing these qualities of mind like mindfulness, concentration, alertness, that true and harmless happiness can be found.

So ask yourself as you go through the day, "What direction am I going in?" For too many people, life is like Brownian motion. You've seen those motes of dust in the air that just get

bounced around. If you were to draw a map of where a particular dust mote had gone in the course of the day, it'd be little squiggles all over the place. Well, you don't want your life to be little squiggles. You want your life to go straight in a good direction.

And the choice is up to you. You've got the benefits of having merit done in the past, you're living in a civilized country—i.e. one where the Dhamma's taught—so try to make the most of that. Give your mind the direction, give your life the direction that would be good for you and for everybody else around you: a happiness that harms no one.

And this is how it's done.