

A Separate Place

August 14, 2018

Close your eyes and think thoughts of goodwill. Show goodwill to yourself by breathing in a way that feels good. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths, and notice where you feel the breathing in the body. Then ask yourself, “Is it comfortable? Is this a place where my mind can stay for long periods of time?”

Because if the mind is going to see anything, if it’s going to understand anything, it has to stay. You don’t see continuities if you’re jumping around all the time. You may learn something new in little bits—a little piece of information here, a little piece of information there— but it’s just pieces. If you want to understand it, you have to be able to tie it together. And to tie it together you have to watch things for a long period of time. In particular, you want to watch your mind. So you have to give it a good place to stay, where it can settle down and then you can watch it. But first you don’t watch the mind directly, you watch the breath. Watch the two of them together, to make sure they stay together and have a sense of well-being right here.

There will be things that come up in your mind that are not all that appealing—memories of the past, worries about the future, conversations going on in the present moment—but you have to have a place where you can feel secure in being able to watch what you don’t like about your own mind. Realize that the part of you that’s watching is not infected by the parts you don’t like. All too often we feel if we watch the parts we don’t like, we’re getting infected by them, and that makes us feel worse about ourselves. Learn to simply watch what’s coming up in the mind as something separate.

As the Buddha said, this is how you get past things: You see them as something separate. To see them as separate, you have to have a separate place to stay, which is why we stay with the breath. Otherwise, we get all involved in the images in the mind and the worlds in the mind, good or bad, and we can’t pull ourselves out. So use the breath as a place to pull yourself out. It’s always there, but you have to make sure your ability to stay with it is always there. Keep that in the background all the time.

That way you can live with a mind that’s somewhat likable and somewhat not likable. You can live in a world that’s likable and not likable, but you don’t have to get affected by the likes and dislikes, because you’ve got a safe place to stay. This is how you show goodwill for yourself and goodwill for other beings. If you can’t step out of your thoughts, you just run with them. As you run with them, you run into other people.

So give the mind a good separate place to stay, and it’s going to be for the happiness of all concerned.