

Fighting Old Habits

August 16, 2018

When you sit here with your eyes closed, you could be thinking about anything, but you can also choose to get the mind into concentration. You may be fighting against some old habits, but it is possible to change your habits. So tell yourself, “I’m going to stay with the breath all the way in, all the way out.” Any other thoughts that come up, just tell them that now is not the time. They can come back some other time, but right now it’s time to get the mind to settle down.

The mind needs a place to settle down so it can have a source of strength, a source of well-being. You’ll sometimes find that you’re fighting old habits to get it to stay there. But this is a battle that’s worth taking on, because if you can’t control your own mind, what can you control?

As the Buddha said, the mind is the source of everything you’re going to experience. What you’re experiencing right now is the combination of past kamma—past choices—and present choices. You can’t go back and undo your past choices but you can make a difference with your present ones. There really are choices. It’s not an illusion. So choose to get the mind to settle down, because that’s what’s going to give you strength. Learn how to sidestep anything else that comes in.

As the Buddha said, if people couldn’t change their habits, to drop unskillful things and learn to take on skillful ones, then it wouldn’t have been worth his while to teach. But the fact is that we can. So we should take advantage of those teachings.

There are a lot of teachings out there that tell you otherwise, that you have no choice in the matter, that everything is determined by your DNA or determined by physical laws or whatever. But that’s a pretty hopeless teaching, and it’s never a useful one either. It doesn’t help you make choices. You really do know that you’re making choices, because some choices are hard to make. So listen to a teaching that says that your choices do make a difference and they will have an impact now and on into the future.

So strengthen the mind. Make the mind more steady so that it can see things more clearly and you’re in a better position to make the right choices. This is for your good, and it’s for the good of the people around you. The more you can get some control over your greed, aversion, and delusion, the less the people around you will be suffering from your greed, aversion, and delusion. *You* won’t be suffering from the greed, aversion, and delusion. So everybody benefits. It’s when people don’t believe that they have the power of choice: That’s when the whole world suffers. People just give into whatever impulse comes in and then they deny any responsibility. In a world like that, there’s no peace at all, no true happiness.

We have the choice of what kind of world we want to create for ourselves. And the world we create for ourselves will have an impact on the worlds of other people around us. So try to make the responsible choice, and that will be for your long-term welfare and happiness.