

## *A Mind Trained for Merit*

*August 17, 2018*

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out—because we're trying to change our habits here. You can watch the breath for a minute and then watch something else, think about something else, and it wouldn't have much effect. But if you stick with the breath, you discover you have to develop all kinds of good qualities of mind to stay here: mindfulness, alertness, persistence. You're training the mind to be more reliable.

After all, what is it that shapes your life? Your actions shape your life. And where do your actions come from? They come from the mind. So you want to make sure that this part is under your control and that it's properly trained. Otherwise, it's like living in a house with an animal that's not well-trained. It can create all kinds of trouble, all kinds of messes. But if it's well-trained, you can actually use it to help you do things.

There was a dog they had at a monastery in Thailand one time. They were building a Buddha image up on the hill. They outfitted the dog with saddlebags and every day it would stand there, wait for the saddlebags to be placed on its back, and they'd put a little sand in each saddlebag and it would carry the sand up. So the dog got some merit helping with the construction of the Buddha image they were building. So even dogs can be trained to do something meritorious.

You want to make sure your mind gets trained to do things that are meritorious for you. Otherwise, who knows what direction your life is going to go? But when your mind is in good shape, everything else falls in line.

As you stay with the breath, you're going to be developing the qualities that are needed for consistency, persistence, reliability, so that you can find a refuge inside. We talk about taking the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha as a refuge: We do that by finding out what their qualities are and then emulating them, trying to develop those qualities within ourselves. Those qualities then become our real refuge.

So once you make up your mind you're going to stick with the breath, really follow through. Whatever goodness you make up your mind to do, follow through with it. Otherwise, where are you going to find goodness in the world if it doesn't come from your own actions?