

An Auspicious Day

November 7, 2019

Take stock of your mind: Where is it right now? Is it leaning to the future? Leaning to the past? Try to bring it right here, right at the breath. That's where the body and the mind meet.

If you want to observe the body and to observe the mind, the breath is a good place to stay, because you can see influences coming from both directions: the ways in which feelings in the body influence the mind, and the ways the acts of the mind have an impact on the body. Try to filter them through the breath.

The breath here can be long or short. It's good to start with long breathing for a while to energize the body. You're going to be calming it down, and if you start out already too calm and you make it even calmer, you can put yourself to sleep, you can start drifting off. So energize things first and *then* let them calm down.

Long breathing also helps you notice clearly where you feel the process of breathing in the body. We think of the breath as being the air coming in and out through the nose, but if you pay attention to how the body feels as it breathes, you begin to realize there's a flow of energy, or many flows of energy, going through the body—as you breathe in, as you breathe out—and those are going to be where you want to focus your attention. Because there does come a stage in the meditation where the in-and-out breathing stops; there's no air moving in or moving out, but there is a sense of energy in the body, and that will be your focus at that point. So get used to focusing here.

As you find a place where the breath is especially clear, stay there. And then ask yourself, "Is it comfortable?" If you're not sure, you can experiment with different kinds of breathing: longer, shorter; deeper, more shallow; heavier, lighter; faster, slower. See what feels best for the body right now. And when you find a rhythm that feels good, stick with it until it doesn't feel so good anymore. Then you can change.

Take an interest in the breath, because after all, it'll be your anchor in the present moment. Because ultimately you're going to be watching the mind, and it's very easy when you're watching the mind to get sucked into its different thought-worlds, so that you suddenly find yourself at some other place, some other time, not right here, right now. But if you're with the breath, you know you're in the present moment, because there's no future breath you can watch, no past breath you can watch, just the feeling of the breath in the present. So stay anchored here. Try to take an interest in the breath.

And as you do, you begin to gain insights into the mind: how the mind talks to itself, how the mind lies to itself, and how it can straighten itself out. All of this will happen right here. The reason we don't see it is because we're off traveling someplace else.

When I was in Thailand we once had a group of workers delivering some rebar. The boss came and gave a few instructions and then left. And so they ignored his instructions. This is the way it is with the mind: You give the mind a few orders—do this, do that—and then you go off traveling in the past, traveling in the future, and the work that should get done in the present moment doesn't get done. If you want it to be done right, you've got to be here watching all the time.

Why is that? Because your life is shaped by your intentions, and your intentions happen right here. And right here is the place where you can put them in good shape. If an intention is made but you're not here, then you have to live with the consequences. The time you *could* have made an input, you neglected it, and then you have to live with the kamma.

Now you're at the point where the decisions are being made, so make sure you make them well—starting with the fact that you want to be alert, seeing clearly what's going on. And you want to be mindful: If you meditated in the past, what worked? What have you learned, either from hearing other people, or from your own observations? Keep all that in mind. And then try to do this well.

Because it is your mind, it is your breath, it is your body. And if you don't take care of these things, who's going to take care of them for you? We're working on our own personal space here, and we're trying to create something auspicious.

We talk about different days being auspicious, or different events being auspicious, but the Buddha said that what makes a day auspicious is what you do. You realize that you have certain duties—duties that are not forced on you by anyone, but you realize that if you find yourself creating unnecessary stress and suffering for yourself and you'd like to stop, there are certain things you've *got* to do. You've got to see where the stress is, you have to comprehend it; you have to see what's causing it and let go; you have to realize there *is* a possibility that there can be a cessation of stress and suffering; and then you try to develop the path to that cessation.

Any day when you're doing these duties is an auspicious day. An auspicious day is made up of auspicious moments, when you're actually doing your duty, when you're on top of what's actually happening, and you're responding well each moment of the day. So right here is where you make the day auspicious, a good day that bodes well for the future.

And again, it's within your personal space. There's a part of us, in each of us, that no one else can touch. Our experience of pain is our own experience of pain. Our experience of concentration is our own experience. Our experience of mindfulness, in other words, our experience both of the problem that we're facing—stress, pain, suffering—and of the cure, the solution: All the different factors of the path, these are things that we experience directly within in an area that nobody else can experience. This is where the work has to be done, in your own personal space, the space you take with you wherever you go. Whether you're here at the monastery, heading back home, out in the forest, or in the middle of a city: You have this

personal space where the work has to be done. No one else can do it for you, and if you don't do it now, when is it going to get done?

When the Buddha talks about focusing on the present moment, it's always in the context of mindfulness of death: the fact that there's work to be done, and if we don't do it now, it's not going to get done. After all, we have no idea when death will come, and where our karma's going to take us afterwards. We try to do our best to make skillful choices here in this lifetime, but there are some possibilities of unskillful choices we've made in the past that might get in the way.

So you want to do your best as soon as possible to put yourself in a place where the mind is really safe. From the Buddha's point of view, that's the point where the mind has seen the deathless. At that point you can guarantee you're not going to fall, and you can begin to breathe a little bit easily.

So the question is, are you there yet? If not, there's work you've got to do. And you don't know how much longer you're going to have to do it, but you *do* know that you have right now. So focus on *right now*, and what can be done *right now*. And if it so happens that you're still going to live for a much longer time, well, you keep creating good *right nows* all along. And it's all to the good. The effort that goes into training the mind, the effort that goes into trying to be as skillful as possible in what you do and say and think is never wasted. It's your wealth. It's your investment in the future.

So here it is, the present moment. You're right here. Alert. Mindful. Ardent. Trying to make the best use of what you've got. We're not here simply to enjoy the present moment. The present moment has possibilities that we can develop, so we're here to develop those possibilities.

In that way, the moment becomes auspicious, and many moments altogether make up an auspicious day. Many days make up auspicious weeks, and so on into larger and larger frames of time. But they all start right here. And they're all made up of these individual moments.

So if you want an auspicious life, this is where it's done. When you take care of what needs to be taken care of in the present moment, you've got all your bases covered. Just keep at it. It's your persistence that helps makes you mindful, and your mindfulness that stitches all these present moments together into something of real worth.