

## *Directing Yourself Rightly*

*January 1, 2011*

Close your eyes. Focus on your breath. Watch your breath all the way in, watch it all the way out. Try not to wander off.

Keep your mind directed on the breath. Because it's when we direct the mind that we really make a difference in our lives. Otherwise, the mind just kind of spins around.

It's like a person you've spun around, like those little toys you spin around and then they go walking off in whatever direction they're facing, regardless.

That's the way the mind is. Sometimes it just gets an idea and it goes and it doesn't really consider whether it's going in the right direction, whether it's useful direction or it's going to run into obstacles.

The Buddha said this is one of the factors that makes for protection in our life, makes for a blessing in our life: directing ourselves rightly. There's a set in the Mangala Sutta, the sutta of blessings and protections, saying that if you've had good karma in the past and if you're born in an appropriate place to practice and you direct yourself rightly, then that's one of the highest blessings.

Now those first two are things that have already been determined. Your past karma: You can't go back and change your past karma. As for whether you're in an appropriate place, well, here you are. The thing is that you're not always in an appropriate place, so take advantage of it while you have it.

That's what the directing yourself rightly is: stopping and thinking about what direction your life is going in.

The Buddha said there are three things that are worth having as your resolve. One, is you resolve to overcome your sensual attachments, your sensual addictions. Another is that you develop goodwill. And the third is that you resolve that you're not going to harm other beings.

You want to take those three things into account, because they are the things that give rise to the right direction in our lives.

If you spend all your time with your sensual passions, it just wastes away, wastes away, and nothing really gets accomplished. All you can think about is the pleasant things you want to experience, and you don't think about the good things that you need to be doing.

It's like using up old money that you stashed away when you used to work but you're not working anymore and you're just living off your old savings. They're bound to run out.

And in the meantime, you develop all kinds of unskillful qualities in the mind. If your happiness depends on beautiful sights, nice sounds, fragrant smells, delicious tastes, it means your situation in life has to be a certain way. Otherwise, you're not going to be comfortable at all. That's the definition of a weak person: a person who has no inner strength.

So one of the first things you have to learn how to do is to overcome your attachment to sensual things, your sensual desires, realizing that there are higher pleasures in life. This is why we practice concentration: to find that higher pleasure.

At the same time, we're expressing goodwill for ourselves, goodwill for others, in the sense that our search for happiness doesn't cause anyone any suffering. And when we find the way to true happiness inside, we can help other people see the way as well.

Finally, the resolve not to harm: This the Buddha said is a form of wealth. We don't tend to think of that as wealth. We tend to think of wealth as the things we gain. But the things we've avoided doing can also be a form of wealth.

Because if you have bad karma in your background, then it weighs on you—especially the things you remember you've done where you've harmed other people, harmed yourself, and you knew better but you went ahead and did it anyhow. That's a real weight on the mind. You can't spend any amount of money to have that weight lifted. So it's best not to place it there to begin with.

So these are three things you want to keep in mind as you're directing your life.

Especially in the coming year: We all say "Happy New Year, Happy New Year" to everybody else. Of course, simply saying "Happy New Year" is not going to cause the year to be happy.

At the same time, what does it mean to have a happy new year? As we all know, things change in life. Things go up and things go down. It's natural. Last year we were wishing everybody Happy New Year and look at the year we got: There were good things and there were bad things.

But the important thing is what you did with your opportunities. That's what makes it a good year, a year of quality, not a year where you're just gathering up experiences. You're actually building a good life for yourself and the people around you.

So make sure that you direct yourself rightly as you go through the new year. Notice wherever you have any sensual attachments or sensual addictions that are weighing you down. Learn how to let go of them. Any places where you have ill will for other people wishing them harm, learn how to develop goodwill in their place. And look for ways in which you're harming yourself or others. Learn how

to stop that.

When your mind is a rightly directed, the year is going to be a good year—because you make it a good year through your determination.