

Grounded for Integrity

May 7, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out.

You want to stay right here. Think of the breath coming in and out like the waves on a shore. The waves rise and the waves fall, and you've got a post that's planted right at the edge of the sea. And it doesn't rise or fall with the waves. It's there planted firmly deep into the earth. Whatever comes, whatever goes, you don't have to be affected by it, you don't have to be shaken up by it. In this way, you don't create any trouble for yourself or for the people around you.

For most of us, our minds are like a post lying on the sand. The water comes in and the post goes up; when the water goes out, it goes out. In other words, whatever affects us, good or bad, the mind picks it up and makes it a big issue. The problem with a post like that is that if there's anybody else on the beach, the post can wash up and break their leg, break their arm. Or the post itself might get washed up against a rock and smashed to smithereens, all because it allows itself to be pushed around by the water.

You want to create a mind that's really solid. It's not pushed around by things. That way, you can maintain your sense of what's right and what's wrong, and not be pushed around by other people's moods or by *your* moods. In fact, your moods are the more dangerous ones. Other people may say things that get us upset but the extent to which we get upset and then do something really stupid: You can't blame it on their words. It's because we take their words and we use them to destroy our own goodness. That's something we've got to learn how not to do.

So the mind needs a place where it can step back from these things and say, "Okay, they said that, but that's just their words. That's their karma." Their karma doesn't have to touch you. That way, the water rises and the water falls but the post stays still. And the post maintains its integrity.

This requires practice, though, because it's so easy to get under the influence of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, things coming in—and also the things coming out of the mind. We go looking for trouble sometimes. We go looking for things to get angry about or to get lustful about or greedy about or fearful about or to worry about. It's the mind going out that creates a lot of the trouble.

So you want to make the mind really firm, so that whatever happens, it has a clear sense of what's right and what's wrong, what it should and shouldn't do. And it can maintain that. That's when it's well-grounded.

So this is how we practice. Starting with the breath and then carrying that principle out into the rest of our lives. It's this way that we become a refuge to ourselves, we can depend on ourselves. Because we learn how to depend on the solidity of the mind, the goodness of the mind. It's not going to get pushed around by other things. That's when you can really feel safe.