

A Student of Yourself

February 22, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Notice the breath as it's coming in, as it's going out, and try to keep your attention right here, right with the sensation of the breathing. See if you can make it comfortable, and experiment with different kinds of breathing to see what feels best right now. When you find something you like, stick with it—until you don't like it anymore. Then you can change the rhythm again.

You want to be on top of what's happening. Because the changes of the breath are nothing compared to the changes of the mind. As the Buddha said, the mind can turn around so quickly that there's no good analogy for how quick it is to change. And here he was a master of analogies and similes. But he says that nothing is as quick. Not even the flash of an eye is as quick as the mind when it changes. So you want to be on top of that. Train yourself to be with the present moment to see what's actually happening so you can see the truth of what's happening.

As the Buddha said, what he was looking for in his students was that, one, they be observant, and two, they be truthful. As we're meditating, we're developing both qualities: learning to observe the breath and observe the mind at the same time to notice when the mind slips off. Because if the mind doesn't have one particular thing to stick with, it can wander around all over the place. And you don't know where it's going because it doesn't leave any traces. But when you give it one thing to focus on, then you know when it's moved.

Then you want to be truthful about the moves. When the mind moves in a bad direction, you want to be able to admit it, because when it moves in a bad direction it's going to turn into an intention. And that intention will get into your words and deeds, and you'll end up creating a lot of karma.

So you want to be truthful about what's happening. What's arising in the mind right now? Is something unskillful arising? If it is, admit it and then put it aside. If you don't admit that it's unskillful, then there's no way you can put it aside. You just ride with it as you ride with everything else. At the same time, when something skillful comes up, you want to notice that, too, so that you can encourage it, strengthen it. Because the skillful thoughts are your friends. The unskillful thoughts, they've snuck in but they're not necessarily friendly. They don't necessarily have your best interests in mind.

So you want to be right here to see what's happening. Try to be observant; try to be truthful. In this way you become a good student of the Dhamma. And becoming a student of the Dhamma of course means you're becoming a good student of yourself, seeing what's going on and then learning from what's happening, so that over time you're more and more likely to choose the skillful alternative.

And that's for your well-being and for the well-being of everybody around you.