

Preparing for the Future

September 5, 2017

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Each time the breath comes in, be with the breath. Each time it goes out, be with the breath. Try to stay right here.

And try to figure out what ways of breathing feel comfortable right now. Does your body need to be energized by the breath? Okay, breathe in a way that's long in, short out. If it needs to be relaxed: short in and long out. Or check on your own to see what feels best right now. It could be heavy or light; fast, slow; deep, shallow. Try to make a survey of what the body needs at the moment. Be here in the present moment, watch the present moment. As for any thoughts that go out to your responsibilities outside, say, "You don't need those right now. You need to be responsible right here."

The Buddha talks about future dangers. He tells the monks, "Death could come at any time, social unrest could come, a split in the Sangha"—all kinds of things could happen in the future. And the question is, how are you going to prepare? The best way to prepare is to get your mind in good shape. You don't know the details of *how* things are going to be difficult, but you do know that whenever there's a difficult situation, you're going to need mindfulness, you're going to need alertness, you're going to need powers of discernment to figure out what the best thing is to do.

So you can develop those things right now. In fact, when you're with the breath, that involves mindfulness, reminding yourself to stay with the breath, not to go away. Alertness is when you actually watch the breath and watch the impact that your concentration has on the breath and on the mind. Is the way you're focusing on the breath good? Or could it be changed? This brings in your discernment as to what you really need right now, what's the best thing right now.

When you sharpen and strengthen these abilities, then you're ready for just about anything that comes. There are all too many times when we prepare for the future thinking, "Well, it's got to be this way, it's going to have to be that way, and we're going to have to prepare this and that," and then the future turns out to be something else entirely. In that case, the preparations are a waste. But if you prepare yourself in a more general way—"These are the skills you're going to need to be able to think quickly and see things clearly"—that way you're ready for anything.

So when you're sitting down with the breath and the mind says that you've got to think about this, think about that, say, "Wait a minute. First I've got to get the mind in good shape. Then we'll think. Then we'll plan." When the mind is in good shape, the thinking and the planning will go a lot better. They'll be a lot more effective and a lot more appropriate for whatever the problem may be.

So in taking care of your mind like this you're being very responsible, in a way that's going to help you and help all the people around you.