

Unsubscribe from the World

March 10, 2018

Focus on your breath. Try to breathe in a way that feels comfortable. You can pose that question in the mind: “What breathing would feel comfortable now? Long? Short? Fast? Slow? Heavy? Light? Deep? Shallow?” Start with deep breaths. Think of the breath going all the way down through the torso. And if that feels good, keep it up; if it doesn’t, then you can change.

We’re trying to be in touch with the news inside, rather than being concerned with the news outside. The news inside concerns what your mind is doing right now. You want it to stay with the breath, because the mind needs a good place to stay if it’s going to be able to look at itself, look at other things with any kind of objectivity. Otherwise, we’re running around being pushed around by this event, pulling ourselves toward that event. And as we’re running around like that, it’s hard to see anything clearly at all.

We know so much about the world and yet so little about ourselves. Now’s the time to take some time to look inside, and put everything in the world outside. It seems as if the world is getting more and more invasive all the time. You can carry the world around in your pocket now and have access to anything. And almost anything can have access to you. So it’s good to take some time to disconnect, unsubscribe, pull out for a bit and get to know the mind on its own terms.

Despite all the flood of information coming in, the mind is what shapes our understanding of the world, and you want to make sure it’s doing a good job, that it’s not overwhelmed. In doing that job, we’ve picked up some influences from outside, but we have some influences from inside as well. You want to sort them out to see which ones are skillful, which ones are not—in other words, which ones lead to a happiness that’s blameless and solid, and which ones lead in another direction.

It’s as if you have a whole committee of voices inside, with all different kinds of ideas, and you have to sort them out. Who are the ones you can trust? Some of the ones that come from outside you can trust, some you can’t. Some of the ones that come from inside you can trust and some you can’t, but they’re the ones who shape your experience. And in shaping your experience, they’re the ones who determine whether you’re going to be suffering from it or not suffering from it. That’s the reality we all have to deal with.

As for the world outside, there are so many worlds outside it’s hard to know which one you can say you actually live in. You move from world to world all the time. But the process of moving, the process of choosing a world: That’s something that happens inside.

And that’s what the Buddha discovered. That’s where the truth lies: in that process. In other words, the process may be shaping a false view of the world, but the actual steps in the

process are true events you can observe directly for yourself. You want to get to know those steps really well. And focusing on the breath is a good way of doing that, because you have a comfortable place to stay and *one* place to stay. That way, you can watch the mind as it relates to its object and learn about how it shapes things.

This is one of the reasons why we consciously shape the breath, not only so that it feels good to be here but also because it helps us understand what it's like to shape things. If you say, "Well, I'm just going to watch whatever way the breath comes in and goes out on its own," you're denying the fact that you're actually shaping it. That means the act of shaping goes underground. When things go underground, you can't see them. Bring them up into the light of day. As long as you're shaping your experience, you might as well shape it consciously and well. Then, from the breath, you can transfer this skill to other areas of life, too.

So it's good to take some time every day to get to know your breath. We study things outside all the time. Take some time to study your breath, study your mind. The outside information we study is going to change someday. I look back at the textbooks I studied in, what, forty years ago: A lot of the information has changed. But the ways of learning how to study haven't changed. And it's the same with the mind. The information we pick up now: Some of it will have to change. But the way we shape things is going to stay the same, unless we decide to figure out how to do it better.

So try to figure out what you're doing in shaping your experience and where you're causing yourself unnecessary suffering, and you've learned a really important skill.