

What Matters in the World

July 15, 2018

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

Try to make sure that the breath is comfortable. After all, this is the force of life, the force of life that keeps the body and the mind together, and if there's something wrong with the breath, then things are going to be wrong with the body, going to be wrong with the mind.

So pay careful attention right here. As for things outside, you can let them go. Nothing is as important as watching your own mind right now. We watch the media and they tell us that the important things in the world are things that somebody else is doing someplace else. That's not the message of the Dhamma. The message of the Dhamma is that what matters most in the world is what you're doing right here right now.

So what are you doing? You want to make sure that your mind is acting on skillful intentions. And the intention to get it in concentration is a skillful intention right there. Try to maintain that intention. This is what the Buddha calls right effort, because the path to happiness does require effort. It's not going to just happen on its own.

As the Buddha said, wisdom begins with realizing that you have to ask an important question, "What, when I do it, will lead to my long-term welfare and happiness?" The wisdom there is, one, realizing that there is such a thing as long-term happiness. It's not the case that things just come and go, come and go, and it doesn't matter when they come and go. Because long-term happiness is a happiness that's solid, a happiness that's secure, whereas short-term happiness turns into something else. It turns into pain. And two, the difference lies in your own actions. You put your finger in a fire, it's going to burn. If you don't put your finger in the fire, it's not going to burn you. It's as simple as that.

So everything depends on your actions, realizing that what comes out of your mind is a lot more important than what comes in. What comes in will have an effect, but it's your choice of what to look at that matters, along with what's actually going out to look at things and listen to things: What choices are you making? Try to make skillful choices. Because those skillful choices will shape your life now and on into the future.

We tend to blame our problems on the world outside—and sure enough, there are problems in the world outside—but the problems in the heart are something separate. You can make them depend on the world outside or you can be free not to make them depend. That's your choice.

So choose to do what's skillful, choose to do what's wise, pay careful attention inside. As for the world outside, you pay attention to what they're doing on a secondary level, but what comes first is what you're doing right now. Make sure you always keep that in mind, because that's what makes all the difference.

