

Above the World

February 24, 2013

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

Just keep with the breath.

As for any other thoughts that may come wandering into the mind, just let them wander on out. You don't have to get involved with them. You can lift your mind above them.

This is the theme of a Dhamma talk the Buddha gave this time of the year. Tomorrow is Magha Puja. It celebrates the time when, during the first year of his teaching career, on the afternoon of the full moon day in February, 1,250 of his arahant disciples all assembled. They hadn't made an appointment but they all came together.

So the Buddha taught them the basic principles of the teaching. After all, these people had gained awakening in some cases just after hearing one or two of his Dhamma talks. So he wanted to make sure that they had a complete idea of what his teachings were about before he sent them out to teach.

So he gave an afternoon talk on the topic and ended with a phrase, "being devoted to heightening the mind" is the teaching of the Buddhas.

What does it mean to heighten your mind? It means that you lift your mind above its ordinary level. This principle is explained by three other principles that he gave that day.

The first is that you don't do any evil at all. And "evil" here means even the slightest thing that's going to cause any harm to yourself, any harm to anyone else. You're not going to get involved in it.

Which means that if other people say harmful or unpleasant things to you, you just let it stop right there. You're not going to pick it up and carry it on. You raise your mind above what they said, so that what they say just falls to the ground right there. It's their karma. It doesn't become your karma anymore.

The second principle is developing skillfulness as much as you can. We all already have some skillful qualities, but we have to put an extra effort into figuring out: Where can we be even more skillful?

Because it's very easy to get satisfied with your precepts, with your level of goodness and say, "I'm good enough." But if you're really good enough, why is there still suffering in your life? Why is there still stress in your life? What are you doing that's still unskillful?

You might want to look into your behavior. Look into your thoughts. Decide what needs to be improved. And always be willing to learn.

That's the most important principle we have as practitioners: that if we see we've made a mistake, we want to learn from it.

If you want to identify yourself with a sense of self esteem, this is the best kind of self esteem to have: that you're willing to recognize mistakes, to learn from them, and to correct them.

The third principle is that you cleanse your mind. In other words, you see if any thoughts come into the mind even before they've come out in your words and your deeds, you cleanse the mind of greed, you cleanse the mind of anger, you cleanse the mind of delusion. Any thoughts that come in that would lead you in those directions, you have to question them, "Why would I want to go with you?"

It's like a car driving up and the driver saying, "Jump in!" You say, "Wait a minute. Who are you? Where are you going?" If you see that it's greed, aversion, or delusion, you know it's going to take you to a place you really don't want to go. The problem is that you think the joyride may be a little bit of fun along the way, so you jump in.

You've got to learn how to resist that temptation. Resolve that whatever comes into the mind that's going to cloud the mind, you're going to wash it away.

You want the mind to be bright so that when you have to make decisions, your awareness of things is not clouded. There aren't any walls of ignorance inside the mind, with one part of the mind hiding something from another part of the mind. You want everything to be wide open and clear.

That's how you heighten your mind.

When your mind is heightened, then when people come and say unkind things to you, you don't let your greed, aversion, and delusion get in the way to pick those things up to throw them right back at them. Because what happens, of course, is that if they've been throwing hot coals at you and you pick them up, you burn your own hand.

So if they want to handle the hot coals, that's their business. You don't have to burn yourself. You can lift your mind above these things.

When the mind is lifted above these things, people can squabble but you don't have to get involved in their squabbles. People can fight over things, but why fight over the kinds of things that other people are fighting over? The thing of real value in your life is your own goodness. You don't have to fight over that with anybody else.

So try to make sure that you follow this principle of keeping the mind heightened, above all the petty concerns of the world at large and your old own

petty concerns.

In that way, you come to realize the benefits of the Buddha's teachings: that the mind really can train itself, it really can lift itself above its unnecessary stresses and strains—the ones that's it's causing itself—and find real brightness in life.