

## *A Trustworthy Mind*

*January 19, 2009*

In Thailand on the King's birthday and other important days related to the King, people meditate and dedicate the merit of the King. So tonight I'd like us to do the same for our new leaders, so that they can rule wisely, with the common good in mind.

So get your mind in a shape that you'd like to give as a gift. That means you want to get it as centered and One as possible. The closer you get the mind to being genuinely One, the more value it has—the kind of thing you'd actually like to give as a gift. It's not when you have lots of different thoughts and lots of different ideas that the mind has great value.

It's like having a fruit. If the market is full of that particular kind of fruit, it doesn't have much value at all. If there's only of one that particular kind of fruit in the market, it can fetch a really high price.

So try to make your mind One, so it has a high value. Think about the other qualities as well that make the mind valuable, something you can trust.

Think about the qualities you can trust in a friend. The Buddha says there are four: conviction, generosity, virtue, and discernment. Try to bring those qualities into your mind as well.

Conviction here means conviction in the Buddha's awakening, which in our lives translates into conviction in the importance of our actions, believing that human action can lead to a true happiness, that your intentions really do shape what you do. You're not acting under the force of the stars or outside fate. You do have free choice—if you take advantage of it. Many times we just let everything go on automatic pilot.

But the more we look into the mind, the more we're clear about what's happening in the mind, then the more we begin to realize we really do have our choices. We're making them all the time, and they are important. If you find a person who believes in that, that's the kind of person you can trust, much more than a person who doesn't believe in that. A person who believes in the principle of action has to be very careful about how he or she acts. Foster that principle in your mind as well, so that you can begin to trust your mind, too.

Then, based on that, you've got the principle of generosity, because that's one of the first areas where you exercise your free will. It's one of the areas even as children we began to have a sense that we have choices. In the beginning, we give things because we're told to. When Christmas comes, when birthdays come,

things have to be given. There's a sense of compulsion there. But think back and ask yourself: When was the first time you actually gave a gift totally out of the desire to give? You didn't have to give it, but there was something you wanted to give to this one person because you felt it might be good. That's the point where your mind begins to have a sense that it does have choices, and that they can make a difference in the world.

You want to nurture that sense of the choices you have, and that the best choices are often those that take the form of generosity. You're happy to nurture that quality in the mind. In terms of the meditation, that translates into the realization that if you're going to get anything out of the meditation, you first have to give. You have to be willing to give your energy, willing to make sacrifices, willing to push yourself more than you normally might want to. When you've already had experience in the past of appreciating what a good thing it is to be able to give and that it really is an expression of your freedom, then you've got good habits to build on.

The next quality is virtue or restraint—which is what virtue is all about, restraining yourself from doing harmful things. Again, if you encounter that in another person, that person is likely to be a person you can trust—much more than someone who doesn't exercise restraint, who's very casual about the principle of trying to restrain himself from doing harm. Stay away from the people who keep saying it's really hard to tell what's right and what's wrong, that it's all very fuzzy. The areas where it's actually fuzzy are very, very minor. The important ones are all generally pretty clear. And you want to promote that clarity in your life.

Then there's discernment, which, in the sutta where the Buddha talks about these qualities, is described as discernment into arising and passing away, seeing how things arise in the mind, seeing how they pass away, understanding how and why they arise, coupled with a sense of when something arising is skillful or not. The things that are skillful, you want to encourage; things that are not, you want to discourage, you want to learn how to undercut them. But it's by seeing things arising and passing away that the mind begins to detect what's actually going on.

This can occur on many levels. Say there's anger in the mind. If you see it as a constant undercurrent, you're really missing something important: that anger comes and it goes. Even when angry thoughts occupy your mind for long periods of time, it's not that anger's there all the time. You slip into it; you slip out of it. When you begin to see that it comes and goes, you put yourself in a position where you can actually do something about it.

The same with good qualities: Mindfulness comes; mindfulness lapses. It comes back again; lapses again. Learn to recognize when it's there, when it's gone, so that you can do something about it, to encourage it to come and not pass away.

It's in seeing these things arise and pass away that you begin to realize, Yes, you do have choices. And your choices really can make a difference. The good qualities in the mind can be nurtured, and the unskillful qualities are not constantly there. You don't have to give into them. This puts you in a position where you're not totally under the thumb of the unskillful urges, and you're more heedful about what is skillful.

So when things are going well, you don't get complacent. When you find the mind is not going where you want it to, you have some skill in learning how to correct it in the direction where you want it to go. In other words, just wishing that it's going to be good won't make it good. Or when things aren't going well, you can't just wish for them to go away. You actually have to see how things come and how they go, what causes them to come and go. That puts you in a position where you can influence the coming and going.

All four of these qualities are based on the principle that you're free, or can be free, to make skillful choices in how you act, how you speak, free to make skillful choices in how you manage your mind. And it's the realization of your freedom that you actually make yourself more trustworthy, because otherwise you can talk yourself into getting into some really bad habits and convince yourself that you can't get out. That way, the mind becomes its own worst enemy. As it says in the Dhammapada: You can harm yourself more than even your worst enemy can harm you.

So trustworthiness starts with conviction in your potential for freedom, in the power of the choices you can make. Then you build on that. That's how you bring value into the mind. Then, if you want to dedicate your practice to somebody, it's a practice they would actually be glad to have dedicated to them, something that's genuinely worthwhile.

So try to instill these qualities into your mind. You'll find that you can trust yourself more, and other people can trust you more as well. It's one of the principles of the whole idea of refuge. You take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha by bringing their qualities into your mind. As you do that, you eventually become part of the Sangha that other people can take refuge in, too: the noble Sangha. This is how goodness gets spread around. But it's up to you to exercise your freedom to choose that goodness to begin with. That's where it all starts.