

Taking Charge of Your Life

January 6, 2012

Close your eyes and watch your breath.

Know when the breath is coming in, know when it's going out.

If you have trouble staying with the breath, you can think a meditation word to go along with it: *Bud-* in, *-dho* out. *Buddho*. It means awake.

That's the quality we respect in the Buddha, that he woke up. It's as if his mind had been asleep for a long time, acting under delusion and ignorance. And finally he realized what he was doing. That's when he woke up.

That's the quality we want to develop in our own minds, too, because a lot of us go through life as if we were sleepwalking. Our ideas of happiness, our ideas of what we should and shouldn't do, we pick up from all kinds of places. And they're not all that reliable.

So you want to be able to stop and take some time to look at your own values, to decide what really is important in your life and what's not; what you really want out of life and when you're just going along with what everybody else is telling you.

This is one of the reasons why we try to bring the mind into the present moment: so that you can think about these things and observe what you're doing in your life. When you say something, when you do something, when you think something, what's your motivation? Why are you doing this? What do you expect to get out of it? Are your expectations realistic? Or are they just more ignorance? And do they really take you where you want to go?

The Buddha said it's possible for us human beings to find true happiness. We can do it through our own efforts.

Are you finding true happiness in your life? Or is your happiness not really all that satisfying. If it's not satisfying, you want to turn around and look at your actions again. Because the fault doesn't lie with the people outside, it lies with you. You're acting, you have the right to act and make choices, but you're not making the most of it.

So you want to turn around and look at your own actions, to see what might be improved.

Look at your words: See what might be improved there.

The Buddha says there are four kinds of speech you want to avoid:

One is lying, when you say something with the intention of misrepresenting the truth. Then there's divisive speech, when you try to break people apart. There's

harsh speech when you speak basically just to hurt people's feelings. And then there's idle chatter: speech that doesn't have any real purpose at all.

All of these forms of speech, he said, lead to suffering in one way or another. There's a lot of stress in lying, a lot of stress in all of them. You create a lot of trouble for yourself, you create trouble for the people around you.

So if you find yourself engaging in these kinds of speech, you can tell yourself, "I've got to stop."

You can speak truthful things; try to speak in ways that are harmonious, bringing people together. If someone's doing something wrong how can you phrase things in such a way that they'll actually be willing to change their ways?

And as for idle chatter: you ask yourself, "Why am I saying this? If you're speaking with people trying to make them feel at ease, that's one thing. But idle chatter is something that just goes on and on and on without any aim. And it's so easy to get into the other forms of wrong speech if you're not really paying careful attention to what you're saying.

So you want to be more deliberate, you want to look more carefully at what you're doing and saying because this is the source of all your happiness in life. It's also the source of all your pain. So you've got the choice.

When we meditate, bringing the mind into the present moment like this, it gives us a better opportunity to look at what would be a wise choice.

It gives you a comfortable place to stay. You stay with the breath coming in, going out. Let the breath be comfortable, a nice place to stay. The mind feels less need to wander out and look for trouble.

So make a practice of stopping every day and looking at your mind, looking at yourself, see how things are going. Figure out if anything needs to be changed. That way you take charge of your life.

This is what the Buddha's teachings are all about. This is why we bow down to him. He teaches us how to try to find true happiness. We have to depend on ourselves—we can't expect him to do the work for us—but he shows us that it's possible and he shows us the way. That's worthy of a lot of respect right there.