

## *Along the Bright Path*

*June 17, 2012*

Close your eyes. Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths and see how it feels. Try to breathe all the way down through the torso so that the breath can energize the body and provide a good place for the mind to stay.

This is important, because the shape of your mind determines where you're going.

As the Buddha said, there are four kinds of people: people who come in darkness and go in darkness, people who come in light and go in light, people who come in darkness and go in light, and people who come in light and go in darkness.

Of course, we want to go in the direction of the light. That means that the mind has to be trained. Otherwise it gives in to its moods all the time, and the things you do through your moods are not all that reliable. You want to have your decisions based on mindfulness, alertness, and clear discernment of which is the bright path and which is the dark path.

Coming in darkness means that you're born in a poor family, you're born with difficult conditions, you may not be good-looking, your parents don't practice the virtues. In other words, you start out with a really difficult place.

Coming in light means that you're born in a wealthy family, your parents are virtuous, opportunities for education are easy, things come easily to you.

But the direction from which you come is not all that important. It does help that you have parents who are virtuous because they show you the path that goes to brightness. The path going in the direction of the light means observing the precepts, training the mind, making sure that your behavior is harmless and that you're generous with other people. You train the mind in a good direction so that you can overcome your greed, aversion, and delusion as much as you can. That's what it means to go in the direction of the light.

Going in darkness means that you break the precepts; you're not virtuous. In other words, you just pile more bad karma on top of yourself.

So the extent to which we've come from the light, part of that we owe to the virtue of our parents. Today they say is Father's Day. Well, today's father's day as much as any other day is father's day, just as today is mother's day, and any other day is mother's day. You have to remember the virtues of your parents all the time because they've set you in the right direction to the extent that they are virtuous.

But then you have to look at your own life. You can't depend on your parents

forever. You've got to make your own way. And which way are you going to follow? Are you going to go in the direction of the light or are you going to go in the direction of the darkness? That's your choice.

It's important to realize that we do have the choice. Life isn't totally determined. Your choices make all the difference in the world. So every time you're about to do or say or think something, ask yourself, "Which direction is this going to turn you in?"

As the Buddha once said, he got on the path when he divided his thoughts into two types: the types that were motivated by sensual passion, ill will, harmfulness on one side, and those that were motivated by renunciation, good will, and harmlessness on the other side. Notice: When he divided his thoughts, he didn't divide them as to whether they were smart or not-smart. He didn't focus on the content. He focused on, "Where do these things go?"

They come from the different motivations, and the motivations determine where these thoughts are going to lead. So learn to step back from your thoughts and ask yourself, "Which direction are these things leading?" Then try to choose the direction of the light. Because, as I said, ultimately it doesn't really matter which direction you come from. What really matters is where you're going.

And that's up to you. Try to train the mind as much as you can so that it stays steadily on the path that leads to brightness. And don't let the path to darkness tempt you away from the bright path.