

Shaped by Determination

December 31, 2012

When you focus on the breath, you've got to make up your mind you're going to stay right here. That means that with each breath coming in, you remind yourself, "This breath, this breath, this breath." The determination applies here, too. This is an important principle to remember.

When you're making a determination, there are four qualities that the Buddha recommended. One is that you start out with some discernment to figure out: What do you really need to determine in your life? Remind yourself that your life really is shaped by your determinations. If you just go through life with *whatever*, your life doesn't really go in any direction. It's like those little motes of dust in the air that get blown this way, blown that way, but they don't have any direction of their own. If you want your life to have some meaning, if you want your life to have some accomplishments, you've got to make up your mind that you want something really strongly and you're going to do what's needed to do it. So you have to first look at what's worthwhile: What would be a good thing to determine?

In every case, you first want to focus on your mind. What qualities of mind are you lacking? Those are the things that really are important to develop in life. If you develop things outside, or develop your own body, those things last for a while and then they change. But if you develop the mind, that's something that really sticks with you. Once you've decided that this is where you want to develop things, then you ask yourself: Where do you still have some weak points? What should you focus on improving? This, too, is a factor of discernment.

Then you figure out what needs to be done. Once you know what needs to be done, then you really stick with it regardless. You've decided this really is important and you're not going to let other things get in the way. That's the second quality, the quality of truthfulness.

Then there has to be some relinquishment as well. You have to learn how to give up certain things. Because if you want something really strongly, you'll need to give extra time to that, which means that time has to be taken away from other things. So make sure it gets taken away from things that don't really matter all that much. This is where you have to establish your priorities really clearly as to what stays and what goes.

Then the fourth quality that the Buddha recommends is calm. While you're doing all this you've got to keep your mind on an even keel. In other words, when you have minor setbacks, you don't let them get you upset. When you start thinking about all the things you have to give up, you don't let yourself get upset. You remind yourself of the good things that will come from sticking to your determination.

So as we meditate, this is giving us good practice in establishing a good solid determination in the mind. You're going to stay with the breath and you're really going to stick with that

determination. Anything else that comes up in the mind you're just going to let it go, let it go, let it go. And you try to keep your mind calm as you're doing this. In other words, when the mind slips off, you don't engage in recriminations. You just bring the mind right back and get right back to work.

In this way, your determination really does make a difference and it really does change your life. So make sure you choose your determination with discernment and with some wisdom. Then follow it through with some truthfulness. In that way, you really do benefit from the fact that you have this ability to shape your life.

So shape it in a good direction.