

Right Desire

February 27, 2013

You have to remember that mindfulness is something you *do*. It doesn't happen on its own. There's that little perception of the mind that keeps warning you, "Okay. Stay here. Watch this. Take this as your object." You've got to listen to that voice and you've got to keep at it, because it's so easy to slip off.

This is why it's important that we understand that mindfulness is not just plain old awareness or acceptance. It's the act of actively remembering what you want to do and how to do it right. Then you can evaluate what you've done. If it's good, you keep it up. If it's not, then you can change.

This is where mindfulness starts turning into concentration, as the mind begins to settle down because you give it a good place to settle down and you see that you're actually doing it right. You're getting the results. That gives you the confidence that you can settle into the present moment and not be wandering all over the place or *wondering* all over the place what to do next. This is how discernment gets developed, too: by focusing on a particular problem and then watching it and learning from your actions around it.

So these qualities—mindfulness, concentration, discernment—all go together. But they go together because you're working on top of right effort. In other words, you really are trying to do this skillfully, and you've got the desire to do it skillfully.

I don't know how many times you hear that desire is a bad thing, that you don't want to have any desire in your practice, just sit there and whatever comes up is okay. Well, that doesn't get you anywhere. After all, right effort builds on the desire to get rid of what's unskillful and to develop what's skillful.

It's on top of this that mindfulness, concentration, and discernment can develop. So all the things we're really looking for come from this desire. And what's the desire based on? It's based on the sense that we don't want to keep on suffering and we begin to realize that a lot of our suffering is self-caused. It's through the movements of the mind that we're causing ourselves to suffer.

Things outside may be pretty bad, but at the very least you don't have to make them worse by the way you look at them and think about them and deal with them. So once you see that that's the case and you're convinced that this is what you really want to work on, then really do make an effort to do it skillfully. Everything else grows out of that: Your mindfulness grows out of that, your concentration, discernment all grow out of that desire that you've had enough suffering and you don't want to cause any unnecessary suffering any more.

And however long it takes is not the issue. You're on the right path: That's what really matters.