

There's Always a Skillful Option

September 7, 2013

Close your eyes and find a friendly place inside, a place where the mind can stay and it feels okay.

In the beginning, it doesn't have to be anything special, just something that's easy to stick with, relatively comfortable. Teach your mind how to stay there, without grabbing on too tight but at the same time without floating away. You want to get that sense of just right. You're right here with the sensations, but that's it. You're not trying to gobble the sensations down. You're just staying in touch with them.

This is important, especially on a hot day like this. Whatever comes by the way of the mind, it normally just gobbles it down. Then it complains that its stomach aches. Suppose it gobbles down a lot of heat: The heat is not the mind's business. The heat is the body's business. The mind can note that's it's there but doesn't have to gobble it down. That way you can live with it and not be affected by it.

As for the things you want to do in the course of the day, there are some things that the heat doesn't allow, so simply put those aside for the time being. Work on the things that you *can* do.

There are always skillful things that we can do with our time. This is another important principle. Sometimes we sit around waiting in a doctor's room or going someplace where there's a lot of wasted time. Well, other people may be wasting your time but you don't have to waste your time. You can put that time to good use. Use it as a good time to train the mind, to keep the mind centered with a sense of well-being in the midst of whatever else is going on.

In other words, your experience is what you make of it, how you approach it, and that will depend on what your sense of the range of possibilities is.

This is all a very important principle in the Buddha's teachings on karma. He didn't say simply that what you're experiencing now comes from the past and you can't do anything about it. He says there are potentials coming from the past and what you do with those potentials is up to you right now. That's your new karma. And new karma: That's where you're free to choose to do something more skillful or less skillful.

So try to take advantage of the fact that even when things are not all that well outside, and the range of choices isn't that big, still there's always a skillful option. Go for the skillful option.

And if you're not sure what it is, be willing to experiment.

You're trying to develop a good, healthy sense of self as a meditator: The attitude you should have is that you're willing to learn.

So that when mistakes happen or things are uncomfortable, say, "Okay this is an opportunity to learn." Then you just watch carefully. See what you can pick up.

When you have that attitude, every situation is an opportunity. That's how you can make the most out of the fact that we do have the karma to be human beings right now, which is a mixture of good and bad things. You can choose to take the good and leave the bad behind.

And you find that you won't be weighed down. Your stomach isn't going to ache, because you're not gobbling down everything that comes your way. You're selective in your eating.