

How to Motivate Yourself

January 1, 2018

Close your eyes and make up your mind you're going to stay with the breath. Stick with it all the way in, all the way out, each breath as it comes.

When you start with a good intention like this, you want to carry through. If you don't stay with the breath consistently—if you stay with the breath for one or two breaths and then wander off, then come back and then wander off again, come back again—it doesn't have that much power in the mind. It doesn't make that much of a difference in the mind. It just becomes one more place, one more stop on your traplines. The mind gets a little bit of rest but not much. If you want to give it a lot of rest, give it a lot of strength, you have to stick with it. This is a principle that's good to keep in mind.

This is the beginning of the new year. People are making new year's resolutions for what things they want to change in their lives. And it's a good idea, it's a good tradition, that you take stock at the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year about what didn't go well in the last year and what you could change in this year.

In particular, look at your actions, and measure your actions against what the Buddha said are the causes for true happiness: generosity, virtue, development of goodwill for all beings. In which spots are you still lacking? Are there areas where you could be generous that you haven't been in the past? This doesn't mean you have to be generous only with material things. You can be generous with your time, generous with your forgiveness, generous with your knowledge, with your strength. In other words, realize that you have more than enough of certain things and that it's good to share. What areas in life could you be more generous? Make up your mind that that's something you want to work on.

Or you could work on your virtue. Look at the precepts: no killing, no stealing, no illicit sex, no lies, no intoxicants. Where are you still lacking in those areas? You might want to make up the difference this coming year.

And finally goodwill: Are there people out there who you would like to see suffer? If so, ask yourself why. What would you gain from their suffering? Part of you says, "Well, it'll teach them a lesson." But a lot of people, when they suffer, don't learn any lessons at all. They just get more desperate and do crazier and more harmful things. If you had goodwill for all beings, you would hope that they would see and understand the causes for true happiness and be able to act on them, without having to settle old scores. If there are still areas in your mind where there are people you can't have goodwill for, try to develop specifically for them.

And then try to carry it through through the whole year. Otherwise, it becomes just a nice idea that then it floats away. But if you want to have it make a real difference in your life—that

you do experience the happiness that comes from being generous and virtuous and having universal goodwill—then you've got to stick with it.

An important quality here is what the Buddha calls *chanda*, which can be translated as a willingness or desire. In other words, you've got to motivate yourself: to remind yourself of the harm that can come when you're not generous, you're not virtuous, when your goodwill extends to only to a few people. You can end up doing *a lot* of harm to yourself and then it comes back at you.

Or you can think of the rewards of these practices. The rewards of generosity: People will view you with kindness because they see that you're a generous person; you yourself live in a much more spacious mind. After all, when you're generous you do have a sense that you have more than enough of some things. People who are not generous, even though they may be extremely wealthy, have very narrow minds. They live in a world of not enough, never enough. What kind of world is that? They don't realize they're the ones who are creating that narrow, confining world.

The same with the precepts: You can think about the rewards that come from observing the precepts. You live harmlessly in the world and, as the Buddha said, when you haven't done any harm to anyone else, that harm doesn't come back to you. It's just like a hand that doesn't have a wound. The hand can handle poison and not get poisoned by it because there's no opening for the poison to seep in. If, however, you *do* have openings like that, where you've been killing even just little animals, or taking things you shouldn't have been taking, or telling little white lies—and even though it may be white, it's still a lie, in other words, you're misrepresenting the truth, and people learn how to not to trust your speech over time. Those are the drawbacks that come from not observing the precepts.

Then there are the drawbacks of not having universal goodwill: You can't trust yourself around people you don't like; you can do and say things that are really unskillful, and that's going to come back at you again. So you've got to develop goodwill for all.

Try to stick with the precepts in all circumstances. Be generous as you can with what you've got. You'll see that the rewards of these things really are worth it. That way, you motivate yourself to stick with your original resolution.

So try to develop this quality of skillful desire. Learn how to motivate yourself, give yourself pep talks as you go through the year. Start off with a good intention and carry it through all the way through to December 31st. That way, that intention really will make a difference in your mind and a difference in your life.