

It's Up to You

July 29, 2018

Close your eyes and watch your breath—all the way in, all the way out. Make the breath as comfortable as you can. Make this a good place to stay.

And keep watch over your mind. Make sure it stays. Because nobody else can watch over it for you. Even people who read your mind can't make you get concentrated. It's up to you. You've got to stick to this yourself. This is a good thing to keep in mind: All forms of goodness are like this, it's up to you.

Here we are at the beginning of the Rains retreat: This is our opportunity to think about how during the next three months we can up our goodness, “accelerate our goodness,” as they say in Thai. To get the most out of the fact that we still have three more months—well, we don't even know that we have that much—but we have this time left to live and create goodness. And it's our goodness. Nobody else is looking after our goodness for us. We look at the society outside: They're happy to make you greedy about things, they're happy to get you angry about things, they're happy to get you deluded about things—without thinking about whether it's going to be for *your* good or not. They're just trying to get *their* piece of you. All we've got is the Buddha saying to look after your goodness because it's going to make a huge difference now and on into the future.

So it's up to you to decide: How much goodness do you want? This is one of those cases where taking a lot is not counted as greedy, it's counted as having initiative. When you realize that your happiness, your health, your wealth—all the good things in life—depend on your good actions, you want to look at your actions and see: Where are they still lacking? Are you lacking in terms of generosity? Lacking in terms of virtue? Lacking in terms of meditation?

This is a good time to make a determination that for the next three months you're going to be more careful about your precepts, for example. Especially that one about lying: It's all too easy to think, “Well, I can just tell a little white lie and it doesn't matter.” But after a while your speech becomes speech that people can't depend on. People will pick up on it and they won't give much value to what you have to say. And why is that? Because you don't give much value to what you say. Again, it's up to you to look after the goodness of your words, the value of your words.

The same with your meditation. There's nobody out there forcing you to meditate. There are some people who say, “Well, meditate using our app or using our meditation cushion,” or whatever. They've found some ways of making money off of meditators. But as to whether you actually meditate and do it well, they don't really care. You're the one who should care.

So here's your opportunity to say, “I'm going to raise the level of my goodness. Be more generous. Be more generous with my forgiveness, be more generous with my time, look after

my precepts.” Especially the precepts around the mouth: no lying, no divisive talk, no harsh speech, no idle chatter. After your meditation, you might decide, “I’m going to meditate longer: do more walking meditation, do more sitting meditation, or at the very least try to be more mindful as I go through the day.” These are all things that you can decide on, and it’s up to you to make the right decision.

But then again, it’s your goodness, it’s your happiness, and you’ve got to be responsible for that. Even the Buddha couldn’t make you happy. If he could have, he would have been happy to do that, but he realized that each of us has to learn how to look after ourselves. And if you want to look after yourself with ease—as we say in our chant—then you have to look after the causes of goodness, which come from your actions.

So here’s a good time to think about what you’re going to do for the next three months, from now until the full moon in October. Make this a special time in your life because it’s a time when you really can take your goodness seriously and look after it well.