

Investing Your Intention

March 30, 2005

Keep coming back to the breath.

And sometimes you may wonder, “When do we finish with the breath and move on?” But that’s based on a wrong idea of what progress means. Progress means seeing one thing very carefully—more and more carefully all the time, more and more precisely.

Fortunately, when you’re focusing on the breath right here in the present moment, all the things you need to understand for gaining release are all right here as well. You’re at the most important point in your world when you’re focused right here, because everything comes out of this.

The other things you’re aware of come into your senses because of your past karma. And where was your past karma made? Well, it was made right here in a past version of the present moment. And that’s gone. There’s nothing you can do to bring it back.

What’s really important is what you’re doing right now. So you don’t have to worry about other things, other places. Just stay right here. And get really familiar right here.

As Ajaan Lee keeps saying, it’s like walking over the same path day after day after day. As you walk over the path, you get really familiar with it. You know where all the sticks and stones are that you may stumble over, so you don’t have to stumble anymore. You get to know all the plants on the side of the path: which ones you can eat; which ones you can use as medicine. If you just go running once down the path, you’ll never know these things. But if you walk along and you’re observant, you get to see.

So what is there to see right here? Well, there are different kinds of fabrication. There’s bodily fabrication, which is the breath. There’s verbal fabrication: directed thought and evaluation. And there’s mental fabrication: feelings and perceptions. The path consists of comprehending these things.

You’ve got them all gathered together here. You’re directing your thoughts to the breath and evaluating the breath. You’re also noticing the feelings and perceptions related to the breath. You perceive the breath in a particular way, and it gives rise to feelings in the body. It’s all right here, all the basic building blocks that make up your present awareness.

As you watch them, you begin to see how you can take them apart, see how they’re related, see what causes what, what comes as a result of what—and how you can manipulate things skillfully so this is a good place to stay, one that’s both comfortable and very clear.

As for other places that you could wander off to right now: Where would

they get you? What would they do for you?

Keeping the mind at peace, keeping the mind still like this in the present moment requires not only that you see the importance of the present moment but also that you see the drawbacks of the things that could easily pull you away, your old habits of thinking.

If you find that those old habits are really attractive, you might want to turn around and look at them for a while to see exactly what they do for you, where they take you. Do they take you anyplace new? Or do they keep you just gnawing over the same old bone day after day after day without a scrap of meat or a scrap of marrow? Just the taste of your own saliva on that bone.

You can think about the dangers of allowing your mind to run with those thoughts. Because when it runs, it usually doesn't look where it's going. It ends up stumbling, falling flat on its face. You pick yourself up again and go running after another thought, with no thought for where it's going to take you.

And all the things that you've gained from your different plans and schemes and things: What have they gotten you of any real substance? The happiness you've gotten from sights and sounds and smells and tastes and tactile sensations in the past: Where is it now?

And the things you'll get in the future: What's going to be different about them? They give a little taste of pleasure and then the pleasure is gone. We spend so much time taking those little sips of pleasure and trying to dress them up.

This is why advertising works: because the mind works this way. The mind's really good at hyping things. And we wouldn't fall for external hype unless it were already a habit in the mind.

It may sound like we're bad-mouthing the pleasures of the world, but you have to make a choice: Do you really want peace of mind or do you want to keep running after those things? It's an either/or proposition. It's not a both/and. You have to take your choice.

And develop this perspective: on the one hand seeing the importance of the present moment, of what's being produced in the present moment, what can be done with the present moment; and on the other, seeing the drawbacks of the things that you might otherwise run after and try to consume.

This is part of our meditation. Meditation is not simply a set of techniques. It's also a set of values, asking yourself, "What's really important in life? What, when you give it your time and your energy and your strength, really pays off?" You've got to make your choice because your time and your energy and strength have their limits, and they're all running out.

It's like making an investment. Do you want to keep throwing good money after bad, or are you going to turn around and find a better place to invest when you invest your intention right here?

It may seem a small place: just the body sitting here in the present moment, that's it. But when you really develop this awareness that fills the body in the present moment, you find that it shows you things you wouldn't have otherwise even imagined.

They talk about touching the deathless with the body. Well it's right here to be touched. It's simply that we haven't gotten to know the body well enough to be able to touch it, that's all. But it's right here. It's nowhere else.

So there's nowhere else you have to go, nothing else you have to do right now. Just stay right here and really get to know this spot. That's all that's asked.