



Deciding What You Want to Keep, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Look at your life in the same way youâ€™d look through an attic, deciding what youâ€™re going to keep, what youâ€™re going to throw out. Youâ€™re moving from a house with a large attic but youâ€™ve got only a small trailer to make the move. Some things have got to get thrown out so that you have space in the trailer for the things that really mean a lot to you. In other words, there are things youâ€™ve got to give up in order to have the time for the things that really make a difference, that really do give substantial results. Thatâ€™s the underlying insight that informs the teachings on renunciation.

When you think about it, you realize that the time best spent is the time spent developing good qualities in the mind, because those are things that can help you in any situation. You have to devote a certain amount of time to keeping the body strong, but with the body you reach a point of diminishing returns. Ultimately there will come a point where no matter how much youâ€™ve looked after the body, itâ€™s just going to leave you. And sometimes it doesnâ€™t leave you nicely. Sometimes thereâ€™s a messy parting. And in cases like that, youâ€™ll be glad for the time you spent working on the mind, because you realize that thatâ€™s much closer to home. At the same time, the strength of the mind when really developed doesnâ€™t have to depend on the strength of the body. It doesnâ€™t end when the body dies.

This is one of the things you discover as you meditate. Ordinarily, when people are tired they get in a bad mood. They feel overwhelmed, really put upon. But when you learn how to develop a greater sense of spaciousness in the mind, a greater sense of wellbeing in the mind, after a while you begin to realize it doesnâ€™t depend on the level of energy in the body at all. The mind begins to have its own internal nourishment, its own internal place to recharge.

This is why we spend so much time sitting here with our eyes closed, working on mindfulness, concentration, and discernment, because these are the qualities that will see the mind through any situation. When you see people really â€œlosing it,â€• this is what theyâ€™ve lost. Theyâ€™ve lost their mindfulness, theyâ€™ve lost their concentration, theyâ€™ve lost their discernment. So you want to work on strengthening these qualities. Whatever time is spent making them stronger is time well spent.

-Thanissaro Bhikkhu, from "Meditations 2"

