

The Dhamma Channel

August 5, 2013

When you focus on the breath, also pay attention to the perception you have of the breath: the image you have in mind. Think of the body being filled with breath channels and that they all connect—so that when you breathe in, every part of the body gets nourished by good breath energy. If one part of the body has an excess and another part has a lack, think of things balancing out, the excessive parts flowing to the parts that are lacking, so that there's a quality of evenness to the breath energy throughout the body. Everything is breathing together; things are not working at cross-purposes.

Start with deep, satisfying breathing. Then, as the body gets nourished by the breath, you can allow the breath to get more gentle. Ultimately, you actually want it to stop, but you're not going to try to force it to stop. If you force it to stop, you create lots of problems. But simply thinking of everything being all connected allows the breath energy to find its level where the mind is still, the brain isn't using all that much oxygen, and you just don't feel the need to breathe. To do this requires that you listen very carefully to the breath, and you're very wary about any movements in the mind that would interfere. But it's this quality of listening and being sensitive – that's what you're after.

Think about listening for a far, distant sound. You have to get very quiet to hear the sound; you want to make sure you're not making any noise. For the mind to see the refinements of the breath, the mind has to get very refined as well. So think of your awareness being refined right here. Then, when there's less interference from the mind, you'll find there's less interference from the breath. Things grow very, very still, and you can see things clearly. The slightest movement that comes up in the mind is very apparent because you're not sloshing around. When the mind is still in this way, you can hear the Dhamma. In other words, you notice what's going on – cause and effect in the mind, and also outside in the world around you.

One of Ajaan Fuang's favorite sayings from Ajaan Mun was the answer Ajaan Mun gave to the scholarly monk from Bangkok. The monk asked him, "Here I am, living in Bangkok with all these educated monks around, all the best Dhamma talk givers in Thailand. And even

then, I have some problems that no one can answer. But you're out here in the forest all alone...." There was a little edge to the question: "You're out here in the forest all alone, so where do you get to hear the Dhamma?" And Ajaan Mun said, "I hear the Dhamma 24 hours a day except when I'm asleep."

What this means is that the slightest thing happens, and you can see it as a lesson in Dhamma. The Dhamma's all around. After all, the Buddha didn't make up the Dhamma; he discovered it. And this is how he discovered it: by getting his mind really quiet and observant. The trick is learning how to tune in so you can hear the Dhamma. We're like those satellites that are trying to detect infrared radiation, and the infrared detector has to be shielded from the satellite itself because, of course, the satellite has warmth. It's sending out infrared rays. And this is our problem. The Dhamma's being broadcast day and night, day and night. The reason we don't notice it or hear it is because we're broadcasting our own stuff: our own greed, aversion, delusion, our own desires, our own craving. We broadcast out, looking for satisfaction for our wants, satisfaction for the needs we have, and it's just I, I, I like the little traffic cone in the article in *The Onion*: I, I, I important! I, I, I want this; I, I, I need this. All you hear are the rays you've been broadcasting yourself.

So one of the reasons we get the mind into concentration is so it can settle down, get a shield from those rays, and tune in to the channel of the Dhamma. Seeing cause and effect, where there's suffering, where there's stress, what's causing it, what can be done to put an end to it: When you look for that, you see that it's being broadcast all over. We talk about how easy it is to see it in a forest, in a quiet place like this. The first month I was back from Thailand, Ajaan Suwat and a number of the other monks were taken on a trip up to Yellowstone. I stayed here. When they came back, I asked Ajaan Suwat what he'd seen. What had impressed him there? He said, "Inconstancy." His mind was tuned in to that message; his mind was tuned in to the Dhamma being broadcast.

And the crickets here, the trees, the animals... A lot of the calls of the animals remind you that those animals are suffering. And they don't know anything about four noble truths. They don't know anything about the path to the end of suffering, so they're just stuck there for the time being. So you ask yourself: Well, here I am: I've got the opportunity to learn these truths and to benefit from them, but am I

benefitting as much as I can? Or am I in the same state as the crickets, crows, and coyotes?

But it's not just in nature that you can see and hear these lessons. You go into a city. You look at the people around you. There's just a lot of suffering in people's faces – and a lot of it is self-driven.

So if you learn how to tune in to the proper channel, the proper frequency, there's Dhamma all around, everywhere, and you can benefit from it. The important thing, of course, is that transmitter you've got blaring 24/7, transmitting different channels and then, of course, listening to other people's channels, who are also going 24/7. Getting the mind concentrated, getting it really still, helps to tune in to the proper frequency. That way, when people's different ideas of happiness get broadcast your way—or from your own transmitter—you can say, “Is this really true? Or is there an element of self-delusion in here?”

When you're on the proper frequency, then if your mind receives those other frequencies as they scramble the message of the Dhamma, they're very jarring. So you have to be very careful where you're tuned in to. If you're properly tuned, the Dhamma gets very clear: what's right, what's wrong, what's skillful, what's not skillful, where true happiness lies, where long-term suffering lies. If you're properly tuned, it's crystal clear.

So try to tune your mind to the breath energy right now. Tune your mind in to this channel where all the breath channels in the body are connected and everything's nourishing everything else in the body. Listen carefully to the breath needs of the body, and you'll find that that helps get the mind tuned in to the proper channel, where it can see its own genuine needs clearly. Just make sure that the other channels don't scramble the signal.