

Be Decisive

January 26, 2015

One of the purposes of the practice is, in the Buddha's words, to see the as-yet-unseen, to realize the as-yet-unrealized, to attain the as-yet-unattained.

That means doing the as-yet-undone. These things don't just come floating in while you're sitting here waiting for them. You have to look at what your mind is doing and see what you can do that you haven't done before.

Where do you feel the breath in the body right now? Where is it most comfortable to stay focused? What kind of breathing feels best? If you know that already, go right there.

A lot of us have an unskillful habit of taking a while to settle down. Like a hunter checking his trap-lines: You have to make sure that this trap is okay and that one is okay and that's taken care of and "I've thought about that" and "I've thought about this." Then maybe think about the breath little bit, then, "Oops, I've got to think about that over there." Or as you settle down, you find there's some hidden thought that you've been suppressing for the day and, "Oh, you've got to deal with that."

So sometimes you just need the karate chop that says, "Look, that's enough of this: Settle right down."

Most of the things that you think about in the beginning of a meditation session are things you've been thinking about many times before. And they can go perfectly well without being re-thought or hashed over.

There's a term they have in Thai: *ded khaad*. And it comes from a phrase "to pluck something so that it's totally cut off from the plant." So if you've been thinking about things in the course of the day, well you can just cut that off and say, "Look, I'm not going to go there." And really carry through with that determination—because that's what *ded khaad* means: You do something decisively and you stick with it.

That's how concentration arises in the mind. You make up your mind that you're going to do this, and you do it. And then you just keep on doing it.

As for the nibbling-away conversations that come at the edge of your concentration, you don't have to pay attention to them. Just keep focusing in, focusing in, focusing in. What feels really good right now: Stay with that. And you don't have to humor all the other members of the committee. Just plow right through.

At the same time, don't put a lot of pressure on the body as you're doing this. There only has to be a mental kind of pressure. It's the decisiveness that keeps you here, keeps you here.

Because we do have to make decisions. It's not "all good" as they say. And it's not all just Oneness. You have to make choices, things you have to sacrifice.

One of *the* most basic principles in the practice is if you see a lesser happiness that's getting

in the way of a larger happiness, you have to be willing to sacrifice the lesser one for the sake of the larger one. We hear that, but we don't hear it. We want to have everything. We want to have our life a certain way, we want to have our thoughts a certain way, everything has to be like this, like this, like this—and we want all that and enlightenment too.

Well, it turns out that enlightenment comes only when you give up other things. And when you see that something has to be given up you say, "Okay, I've been with this long enough. I've seen its limitations. Let's go for something more unlimited."

Now, the fact that we haven't attained or realized the goal yet makes the whole practice something of a gamble. But then what is life if not a gamble? You want to place your bets wisely—and the practice is a safe bet.

You've got the Buddha on the side of all that's good in the practice; you've got all the noble disciples, you've got the great ajaans. And they're all saying that it's more than worth it. And they're not saying that to get something out of you. It's not like the advertisements out there where, because they're trying to sell you something, they'll of course say that it's really great, whatever. With the great ajaans, though, they're not trying to sell anything. They're just reporting.

So at the very least for this hour, make a gamble: say, "Whatever thought comes up, you're not going to go there. You're going to stay with the breath, stay with the breath." Show a little more decisiveness than you have in the past.

That's how concentration arises and that's how concentration is maintained—and how it becomes something you can rely on.

If you're the kind of person who sticks your toe in the water and says, "Oh! It's a little bit cold," and you jump back and stick a little bit there, "Oh, I don't know about this," back-and-forth, back-and-forth: You just stay on the edge of the lake. You never get to know what it's like to be in the lake. And it may be different from what it's like being on the shore.

As the Buddha said, there's that lake of the jhanas: the cool spring welling up; or when the water finally gets still, the lotuses are saturated from their roots to their tips. We've heard the image. Well, what's it like?

This is not just going to happen on its own. You have to decide that you want it to happen. And then you learn how to make sure that the desire to make it happen doesn't get in the way. That requires some skill.

But there's a huge element that's just a matter of being decisive, saying, "Yeah, this is what I really want and this is why I'm going to stick with it." You've got the breath here, you've got all the instructions on how to deal with the breath so as to settle down. And you don't need more than that aside from your own decisiveness, your own intention.

People sometimes ask about dependent co-arising and how it applies to the meditation. Well one of the important points in dependent co-arising is that even prior to your experience of the senses, you've got to have a certain intention that's going to determine what you're going

to experience.

Well it's the same with concentration. You have to have the intention and you have to be willing to stick with it. That's when it becomes determination.

We read about the ajaans in their biographies and autobiographies: Ajaan Maha Boowa talking about the vows that he would take and how he took them very seriously. When you read Ajaan Lee, notice all his vows. That's the kind of character that does well at concentration.

So try to bring that decisiveness into your practice. And see if you come to realize something new.