

Enlarged Awareness

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An important part of the meditation is learning to develop a full-body awareness. All the images in the texts refer to this. The third step in breath meditation, being aware of the whole body as you breathe in, whole body as you breathe out, is the first thing you've got to learn to do after you get sensitive to short breathing and long breathing. It's the first of the 14 trainings in the 16 steps of breath meditation.

The first two steps aren't trainings. You simply notice when the breath is coming in long, out long; or in short, out short. But with step number three, the Buddha starts saying that you train yourself. And that's the first thing you train yourself to do: Be aware of the whole body as you breathe in; be aware of the whole body as you breathe out.

This is important. For one thing, there's a common problem that as the breath gets more comfortable, more refined, if your range of awareness is small, you slip out someplace else, either you slip into sleep or you slip off into a vision, or into something else away from the breath. That's because the breath get too subtle to notice, and the mind will latch onto whatever else comes its way.

So as the breath gets comfortable, think "whole body," from the top of your head down to the bottom of your feet. Now this may mean going sweeping your attention up-and-down, up-and-down, up-and-down for a while. Or going through each of parts the body one by one by one, till you get familiar with them and then you can connect them.

But after a while, it turns into another image in the Canon: the trumpet blast. You blow your conch trumpet and the sound immediately spreads out in all directions. In other words, even though your focus is at one point, your range of awareness fills the whole body. From there the Buddha has you going to calming the breath fabrications. In other words, as you're aware of the whole body, you begin to be sensitive to the way you pull the breath in, pull the breath out, all of what they call bodily fabrication, and you begin to see where it's exaggerated, where it falls in line with your cartoon ideas of what the breath is supposed to do, or what you think you have to do in order to get the breath in, push the breath out. Try your best to notice where it's unnecessary.

After all, the breath already there. It's always there. There's the breath energy that fills the body and stays with the body all the time. The in-and-out breath, as Ajaan Lee once said, is the visiting breath. so think of the body as breath breathing

breath—not the solid parts of the body breathing, not you breathing, just breath breathing. You don't have to create any pressure here or there in order to pull it in or push it out. That way, you start getting more sensitive to the feelings of ease and rapture in the body. Those you should allow to fill the body as well. Think of the images for the jhanas: the person kneading moisture into the ball of bath powder; the cool waters of a lake being filled with cool water from a spring that constantly wells up within the lake; or the lotuses are growing within the water of the lake, saturated with water from their tips to their roots. All the images of water deal with a sense of rapture and pleasure. Then there's finally the image of a person whose body is covered with white cloth from head to foot. That's the image of equanimity, a feeling of total ease.

All these feelings—pleasure, equanimity—you should try to allow to fill the body as much as you can. In this way, you establish a really good solid foundation for your meditation, a good foundation for your concentration. If your concentration is one-pointed, then as soon as anything disturbs that one point even the least little bit, your concentration is gone. But if it has the whole body as its foundation, and you have a sense of your awareness filling the whole body, it's like a big open field or open screen: Things come in, go out, through the field, through the screen, but they don't destroy the field or the screen. You can try to stick with this one perception, the awareness filling the body, pleasure filling the body, or equanimity filling the body. Try to maintain that wherever you go.

That way, the meditation becomes your foundation, and your sense of the world or your sense of yourself within the world begins to change. It's not that there's a little you inside the world. It's more that there's an experience of the world inside this larger sense of awareness. That becomes more fundamental. That becomes your foundation. If there's a sense of identification there, well, fine, it's a skillful identification. After all, the mind still has its habit of identifying, so give it something good to identify with: a large open sense of awareness. When you can maintain that, you feel less threatened by things. Pains come and go. People come and go. Good people, bad people, they all come and go. But that enlarged frame of awareness: That stays.

Now, you do have to maintain it, which shows that it's not the unconditioned. You maintain your sense of being in touch with it, and that helps loosen your identification with other things, things that are less skillful.

This is why the state of enlarged awareness is so important. It changes the balance of power in the mind. Things that used to seem large and overwhelming, when placed within this frame of awareness, seem a lot smaller, less threatening.

And you can carry this enlarged frame wherever you go. It's a matter of mindfulness, keeping it in mind all the time.

As you do this, you begin to see the other things that make you lose that frame of reference. That's where you learn where your defilements are. This way, the meditation becomes *akaliko*, something timeless. It's not just when you're sitting here with your eyes closed. It's not just when we're having are group meditations. It's something you carry around with you as you go through all your activities. Some of your thoughts may still feel open and naked when you have this enlarged awareness. In other words, when you're dealing with other people in your ordinary ways of trying to figure them out in the course of a conversation, those might have a tendency to take over. So you've got to remind yourself, no, you're in a much better position, you're in a much stronger position with the enlarged awareness. You're more likely to see things as they actually are. It's no guarantee, though. There's still an element of delusion even in this enlarged awareness, but it's a lot less than in your normal reactions to things.

So this is an important part of the training. It's the first training in breath meditation. It's something you have to will, and this is how you get to know intentions in the practice. In other words, you set up a skillful intention and try to stick with it in every situation. It's like riding a boat across the ocean. There are going to be different kinds of waves, little wave, big waves. And you want to stay on your boat, no matter what the wave situation. Hang on to this for dear life. That's how you get across.