Refreshing

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Often we say to watch your breath. That’s not really a good choice of words. A better choice would be feel your breath. Think of wearing the breath, because the breath is all around the body. It’s not just at one spot. It’s everywhere. And you want to be open, alert, everywhere. That quality of mind takes a while to develop, because you know that we have to keep other thoughts away. And to keep them away, we tend to tense up around the breath, to protect it. That actually makes it uncomfortable, makes it an unpleasant place to be. A better way of doing it would be to be here, sitting in your whole body, allowing the breath to come in, go out, around the whole body. As for any thoughts that come in, you don’t have to get involved. You don’t have to chase them away. You don’t have to push them away. If they can float in, they’re going to float out. You try to keep your attention right here. The Buddha talks about maintaining the right level of pressure. He says you put too much pressure on the object of your meditation, it’s like holding a baby quail in your hand, and you squeeze it until it dies. There’s not enough pressure. It’s like holding the baby quail with your hand wide open. Of course, the quail will fly away. So you want to figure out what’s just the right amount of pressure to put on the breath. Think of holding the breath at a slight distance. Jean-Phil would use the word “brekong.” It’s like when a child is learning how to walk. You don’t hold the child, you don’t squeeze the child, but then you’re not too far away from the child. Your hands are a few inches away, so in case the child trips or falls, you can catch him. But otherwise, you give him some freedom. That’s what the breath needs. It needs some freedom. And your job right now is to survey the body. This is what directed thought and evaluation are about. They’re the causes for your concentration. When you focus them on one object, like the breath, and you can maintain those three together, directing your thoughts to the breath, evaluating the breath, then the other factors of right concentration will come in, which are a sense of ease and pleasure, a sense of what in Thai is called “piti.” It’s usually translated as “rapture.” And in some cases, it is that strong. In other cases, it’s more a sense of refreshment. The body feels energized. Refreshed. So it’s where we’re heading as we meditate. We want the mind to have that sense of refreshment. Again, as John Fuling said, if you don’t have a sense of refreshment from your meditation, it’s going to get dry. It’s like an engine that’s been running without any lubricant. It’ll run for a little while, but then it seizes up. There has to be a sense of refreshment as you’re sitting here. Breathing would feel refreshing right now. Which parts of the body should expand and get some breath energy delivered to them? You don’t want to squeeze things too much. One important thing is that we have a tendency, especially when we breathe out, to squeeze not only the lungs, but also our nerves to get the breath out. Well, the breath’s going to go out without your squeezing it, so don’t squeeze. Think of yourself floating right here with the sensations of the body. If the body’s going to breathe in, that’s its business. If it’s going to breathe out, that’s its business. You don’t have to make it breathe. You can think longer, shorter, heavier, lighter, and see how the body responds. But if you pull it to make it longer, or squeeze it to make it shorter, then whatever potential there was for a sense of refreshment is going to go away. So what we’re trying to do is develop a full body awareness that gives equal pressure all around. It’s like taking a photograph. There was a book that came out years ago called Above All. It was pictures of all the mountains in California that are, I think, about 14,000 feet. And the photographer went out and described how his original plan was to take pictures of them right after the sun rose. When they were very brightly lit by the sun. Or right before sunset. Where the intense orange of the mountains get here. But he found that when he set up his camera early in the morning, before the sun rose, it was a nice even light. So he started taking pictures at that time as well. And he ended up taking only those pictures for the book. The ones that were more dramatically lit with lots of light and lots of shadow. He didn’t include it all. Because, as he said, when the light is more diffused, you see all the details. Everything is allowed its space. Nothing is thrown into the shadows. That’s the kind of quality you want with your meditation right here. The whole body is breathing in, the whole body is breathing out, and everybody has a chance to breathe in, breathe out together. When you can do that, there is a sense of fullness in the body. A sense of refreshment. You can’t force this. You can’t squeeze it. Especially not with the force of desire. Again, at John Fu, he said if Nibbana was a place we could get to through the force of desire, everybody would have gone there by now. Well it’s the same with this. You can brookholm, you can shelter it. Treat it gently. Be very gentle with your body. Be very gentle with your breath. And it will develop a sense of refreshment and fullness that you don’t have to create. Because we’re not creating these things, we’re taking a potential that’s already there and just allowing it to show itself. And however long it takes for the mind to settle down, for the body to begin to display these things, you have to learn how to be patient. It’s like fixing scrambled eggs the old way. You put the heat on very, very low, and you stir the eggs in the pan, and for a while it seems like nothing is happening. And then gradually as the pan heats up, the eggs begin to coagulate. And you keep the heat low. And you get nice soft eggs that way. They’re not dry and rubbery. In the same way you want your body to soften up a little bit too. And flow through all the little nerves, all the little blood vessels, the capillaries, out to the pores of the skin, all around. And all you have to do is brookholm. Shelter it. Protect it. And the mind will have a sense of refreshment with the breath. This gives energy to the body, energy to the mind. To make sure that the causes are right, that you’re gentle and patient. Give some space to the body. Stick with the breath, but don’t put too much pressure on it. Think of the focus of a camera. When we focus our attention on something, we not only focus attention, but we also seem to screw up tension right around our eyes. That’s not necessary. When a camera focuses, there’s no tension in the camera. There’s no weight to the light. It just gets focused. Try to have the sense of just rightness in your focus here. Light, but steady. And the body will respond. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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