

Oneness

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Once, when Ajaan Suwat was here, he asked me to give the Dhamma talk in Thai. I had been translating Ajaan Lee, so I used one of Ajaan Lee's images: comparing the practice to digging a well. Generosity was like a very shallow well, virtue a deeper well, whereas concentration was a well down to the water table. Afterwards he told me that the Dhamma talk had been too interesting. It was distracting people from their meditation.

So don't listen to me. Focus on your breath. The talk is here in the background to catch you if you wander away from the breath, like the catcher in the rye. I'm standing at the edge of a cliff in case those of you who are running around in the rye aren't really looking at what you're doing. If I see that you're heading to the edge of the cliff, I'm here to catch you, to make sure you don't fall away from your meditation object.

Or you can think of the talk as a fence. When you start leaving the meditation object, the first thing you'll run into is the fence formed by the sound of the talk. That's to remind you to go back. The word *desana*, the word we usually translate as "Dhamma talk," actually means pointing. And the talk is here to point you back to the breath, back to your present awareness, to make sure you don't go wandering off. Try to stay with the breath. Be one with your meditation.

There are two words with "one" in the Buddha's descriptions of jhana. One is *ekaggata*, as in *ekaggatarammana*, oneness of preoccupation, or singleness of preoccupation; and *ekaggatacitta*, singleness of mind. This kind of oneness applies to all levels of jhana. It means being focused on one thing, like the breath. You stay steadily focused on it, at the same time making it the one thing filling your range of awareness.

So you start out trying to do that. But in the beginning, there are two ones. There's the mind aware of the breath, evaluating the breath, commenting on the breath. That's one thing. And then there's the breath. One subject, one object, and you want to keep both of them "one" in their own ways. You want to make sure that the one topic of your inner conversation is the breath. As for other things that have been going on in the course of the day, you don't talk about them. Don't go slipping off into the past, slipping off into the future, wondering about what you're going to do tomorrow, what you're going to do at the end of the

meditation, or how much longer you have to meditate here. That's introducing other topics of conversation. And the mind never really settles down.

So just keep the topic of conversation on one thing, on the breath, and evaluate how it's going. What kind of breath would you like to breathe right now? You're perfectly free to choose. You may not be able to think about other things right now, but they're off the agenda. They don't really matter right now. When the breath is the one item on the agenda, you can give it your full attention and you're totally free to explore it. What kind of breathing would really feel good right now in your stomach? Let the body breathe that way. Focus on your stomach for a while and see what kind of breathing really feels good there. What kind of breathing feels good going down your backbone? What kind of breathing feels good in your legs? You may not yet be able to breathe with your legs, but there is a breath energy that can flow down through the legs. See what rhythm of breathing keeps that breath energy alive, awake.

Ajaan Lee talks about using your awareness of the breath to wake up the different properties of your body. This is what he means: having a sense that there's an energy flowing through your legs, flowing through your arms, all around your head, all the different parts of your body, out to the fingers and toes, like an electric current. There is even an energy, if you're really sensitive, that surrounds your body. Can you be sensitive to that? And what kind of breathing makes those different parts of the body feel good? Go through the body and tell yourself that you're breathing specifically for your stomach for a while, so what kind of breathing would feel good right there? If the stomach could speak, what kind of breath would it ask for? Then breathe specifically for the sake of your chest: What kind of breathing would feel good in your chest? And so on through the rest of the body: in the shoulder, in the back of your shoulders, between your shoulder blades, in the small of your back, in your hips, in your legs, in your toes, in your eyes. Then try to be aware of the breath in the whole body. This is how the breath, the object of your conversation, becomes one: It fills the range of your awareness. Think of the whole body breathing in, breathing out, and let the whole-body breath flow as comfortably as you can.

Then, after a while, when you've been evaluating the breath, and it really feels good as you're breathing in, breathing out, there comes a point where you don't have to evaluate it any more. As Ajaan Fuang once said, as you fill up the breath energy in the body it's like filling up water in a jar. There comes a point where the jar of water—here we're talking about those big jars that they used to line up along the sides of houses in Thailand to catch rainwater off the roof, enormous jars, sometimes bigger than a person: After a while the jar is so full of water that no matter how much more water you pour into it, it can't hold any more. The excess just flows out.

The same principle holds with the breath. You get to a point where the breath energy feels full throughout the body. The legs feel full, the arms feel full with a pleasant buzz of energy. They feel energized. Awake. And you don't need to do any more evaluation, for they're as full as they're going to get. You're now free to just dive into the breath.

This is where the other word for oneness in the descriptions of jhana, *ekodi-bhava*, comes into play. *Ekodi-bhava* means unification. It starts at the second jhana. The oneness of your awareness and the oneness of the breath become a single oneness, totally unified. You don't hold anything back. That sense of the observer, which is sometimes like an animal perched on your shoulders, looking through your eyes, looking at the breath in different parts of the body: You want to obliterate the sense that that observer is separate from the breath. So you breathe into the observer. Thinking of the breath energy in your eyes is especially helpful here, in creating a sense of being one. Many of our ideas of subject/object dichotomies come from our sense of sight—the object's out there, the eye is in here, and they don't touch. One good way of erasing that dichotomy is to focus on the breath-energy flow in your eyes. The breath is right there; the eyes are right there in the same place. There's no dividing line between them.

This helps to induce a sense that awareness is fully one with the breath; the breath is fully one with the awareness. Then you simply maintain that. Any thought that spills out from that, you don't want. Totally throw yourself into the breath. There's nothing else you have to do, nowhere else you have to go, nothing that has any need to pull you away.

Ajaan Lee makes the comment that this breath, if you're totally immersed in it, will take you through all the levels of jhana, up to the fourth. The difference is simply a matter of how steady you are in staying one with the breath, and of how still the breath grows in response. Ajaan Fuang noted that this sense of total oneness or unification with the object can take you all the way up to the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. It's simply a matter of the perception you hold in mind. After the fourth jhana, you drop the perception of the form of the body—the still breath allows you to do this—and you can focus on the sense of space permeating the mist of sensations that remains. After that perception of space is unwavering, you turn to focus on what's aware of the space. That puts you into the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. To get beyond that, to the dimension of nothingness, you have to drop the oneness. But these tactics work only after this sense of total oneness is developed and strong.

It takes some energy to do this. You've got to throw all your energy into being one with the breath. But you find that by giving all your energy, you get a lot of energy back. That's when everything in the body is really awake. Your

sense of awareness permeates every cell. The breath permeates every cell. It flows so well that the in-and-out breath can grow more and more still.

This is when your preoccupation with the object of your meditation really does become one, not simply in the sense that it's the one thing you're talking about to yourself. Actually, you're not talking about it much any more. You're just in with it. And it fills the whole range of your awareness.

When you do this, you find that any movement of mental chatter in the mind becomes very obvious. When you see it, just drop it, drop it, drop it. When a little stirring happens in your awareness, zap it before you even know what it's going to talk about. This is not the time for chatter. You've got something much better going on here. The mind is snug with the breath like a hand inside a glove, totally surrounded in the breath. The breath has you surrounded on all sides. You're not pulling back to watch it from outside. You're totally immersed in it. To use a phrase from the Pali, this is *kayagata-sati*: Your mindfulness is immersed in the body, your awareness is totally surrounded by the breath, totally surrounded by the body.

Once you can do this, just try to maintain it in a very balanced state. Part of the mind might object: "This is stupid. You're not thinking about anything." But that's precisely the point: You don't have to think about anything. The mind needs this opportunity to rest, to gain energy. Ajaan Lee compares this to putting a knife in a scabbard. You want to make sure that your knife is sharp when you need it, so you have to protect it. Put it in something that keeps it snug and protected on all sides. When you need it to cut something, you take the knife out of the scabbard. Because it's sharp, it can cut right through things. But in the meantime, you've got to keep your mind well protected, well energized. This is when the mind enters into fixed penetration in a very strong and solid way. This is the heart of the path. The other factors will come out of this and surround this—or, as the Buddha says, support this. But this oneness of the mind with its object is the center from which everything else happens.

Ajaan Lee talks about this as the point where all four frames of reference—the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, the mind in and of itself, mental qualities in and of themselves—all become one. You could look at this sense of oneness as any one of the four. From one perspective it's body, from another it's feeling, or mind, or mental qualities. But they're all here in the same place. If you want to see the actual distinctions among them you have to bring them together first. If you draw lines around them before making them one, the lines tend to come more from your ignorance than from genuine knowledge. But if you make them one, then when they finally do separate out, it's not because you tried to pry them apart. Ajaan Lee's analogy is of heating a piece of rock containing different kinds of ore. You heat it to a certain temperature, and the

silver melts out; at another temperature, the gold melts out; at another temperature, the tin—all of their own accord. In other words, you're not dividing things up in terms of your preconceived notions. Instead, you put the energy of this oneness into the breath, to make everything one. That's when things are allowed to separate in a natural way, in ways that you may not have expected. But in the meantime, keep trying to make them one. Get really good at this. This is an essential skill in the meditation. As for the insight that will arise from this, you don't have to worry about it, at least not yet. Just make sure the foundation is solid.