

## *Lifting the Mind*

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It's a common expression in Thai that when you bring your mind to your meditation object, you're lifting it. The first step is to lift it above your ordinary concerns. Get out of the stories and reflections about the day. One way to do that is to remember that you're not the only person who has to train his or her mind. Everybody has to train the mind.

The Buddha on the night of his awakening, when he had those three knowledges, started out with remembering his past lives. Then he moved on to a larger vision, regarding all the beings in the world. When he saw how all the beings in the world passed away and were reborn in line with their actions, he could see patterns, larger patterns than just the day-to-day concerns or the narrative concerns of his lives. It was then that he was able to bring his mind into the present moment, to look for patterns there.

This is one of the reasons why we have these chants every evening, to get you focused the themes of what the chants say. You start thinking about larger concerns than just what happened at work, what happened at home, who said what to whom, who did what to whom. You start thinking about life as a whole and the life of all beings as a whole. And as you look at the world, you can see that one of the big problems is that people don't train their minds. They're blinded by their petty concerns. What applies to them, of course, applies to you. That thought helps you to lift your mind over your normal everyday concerns and bring it to the object of your meditation. If you find it slipping off, then lift it up again.

One of the expression for what we do in right effort is *cittam paggaṇhāti*, which means literally to uphold your intent, or uphold your mind. You make up your mind that you're going to stay with the breath, and then you try to uphold that intention. Again, you're lifting it up above its normal concerns, its normal habits. You want to do something better with the mind than you normally do. And in the course of lifting it up, you actually lift it up a step further as well. Because you have to learn how to observe yourself, say, with the breath: Can the mind stay with the breath? What seems to pull it away from the breath? How do you bring it back? You have to learn how to monitor what you're doing, and this is another way of lifting the mind.

They've done studies with school children and found that the most important skill that the

kids need to learn, in order to learn, is how to observe themselves, how to monitor themselves. It's called meta-cognition. That's when the child reads a page and then stops and asks him- or herself, "Okay, did I understand that?" If he didn't understand it, he has to go back. In other words, you just don't plow through without taking stock of what's happening, what's working, and what's not.

It's the same with meditation. If you really want to learn the meditation, you have to learn how to observe yourself as you meditate. Observe the breath to see what kind of breathing feels comfortable, what kind of breathing is easy to stay with. Sometimes you simply pose the question in the mind and watch, watch, watch, until you feel you can come to a conclusion. There's no great hurry. You've got a whole hour here to watch the mind. If you're not really sure whether something is working, then stick with it for a while. Or if there's a problem you can't figure out, just watch it for a while, then try experimenting a little bit. It's only when you experiment that you can have something to compare. It's only when you have something to compare that you can gain a sense of what it means to "work" and what it means to "not to work," of the range of how comfortable the breath can be, how gratifying, how satisfying, how compelling the breath can be.

You might ask yourself which parts of the body would really feel good if they got in on the breathing, and see how the breathing responds. How about in the chest? How about down into the heart, down through the diaphragm? Which muscles get overworked as you breathe? Can you let them rest? Let other parts of the body take over.

There are lots of questions you can ask, and in this way you learn how to observe yourself. This is where you begin to develop that sense of the observer inside, the part of the mind that simply steps back and watches the causes, watches the results. That puts you in a position where you can actually gauge the causes and gauge the results.

It leads to the next step of lifting the mind, which is that once the mind really can stay with your object, you've got a sense of what works.

The Buddha's image is of a cook who provides different kinds of food to his client—or in the case of the Buddha's image, it's a cook working for a prince or a king or a king's minister. He supplies different kinds of food and see what kinds of food his master likes to eat, which ones he reaches for, which ones he praises, which ones he takes a lot of. Then tomorrow he supplies more of those kinds of food, and as a result the cook gets rewarded.

In the same way, you watch your mind and see what it likes, see what it doesn't like. Once

you notice that it likes a particular kind of breathing—it finds it easy to stay with that kind of breathing, or likes focusing on a particular part of the body—let it stay there. Give it that kind of breathing. That way, it really can stay there for long periods of time.

And as it stays, this is where the next stage of lifting it comes in, which is that you gain a sense that you rise up above even the concentration. You can watch the concentration and ask yourself, “Is there anything in this state of concentration that still could be more refined? Is there any stress here? Any sense of being burdened? What are you doing that’s causing that sense of being burdened to come and go?”

It’s in the coming and going that you actually notice it or discern it. If it were totally steady, you’d just accept it as part of the background. But if you can begin to see fluctuations, you can detect what’s going on. Sometimes the mind feels more burdened with its object, and sometimes it feels less. Sometimes it feels more burdened with all the thinking and evaluating going around the object, and sometimes that thinking and evaluating calms down, and the mind feels lighter. When you see things like that, you can let go of whatever is causing the disturbance.

Ajaan Fuang used to call this lifting the mind above its object so that you can watch even the state of concentration. This is where the sense of the observer gets really strong. This is one of the reasons why it’s called *heightened mind*: The mind’s above its normal concerns. It’s looking for a pleasure that’s not sensual. There’s a pleasure that comes from inhabiting the body in a way that feels really good, but that’s not called sensual. “Sensual” has to do with sights, sounds, smells, touching things outside the body. But that sense of well-being, that sense of fullness inside, as you feel the body from inside, is a higher form of pleasure. So you’re lifting the level of the mind, and you’re strengthening the ability to pull yourself out of different thought worlds, to pull yourself out of different concerns that keep the mind weighed down, from the blatant level to more and more subtle levels.

So think of this as a way of lifting your mind out of its ordinary concerns. Lift it out of its normal sense of who you are. The “you” who’s the person who does the job at work, the person who does things at home, your ordinary everyday concerns: Look at your mind as if it were somebody else’s mind, or you were visiting from some other place, outside of Earth. Any concerns that come up about what happened today, what’s going to happen tomorrow: For the time being, those concerns are not yours. You can lift the mind above them. If you have any responsibilities, don’t worry, you’ll take care of them later, but right now it’s time to put

those things down so that the mind can be lifted up. Because when it's lifted up, it gets a sense of well-being, a sense of lightness, and it can see things more clearly.

Ajaan Lee likes to make a comparison with going up in an airplane. You look down and you can see things on the ground that you couldn't see before when you were on ground level. And, he adds, "When you're up on that higher level, the ordinary concerns of everyday life can't reach you." Say you're up in a glider: If people try to throw mud up at you, they can't reach you because you're up too high. Dogs and cats might try to jump on you, but they can't, because the mind is up too high.

So you're lifting the mind in various stages: first, to gain a sense of well-being, right here and now, and then to gain the ability to see what's actually going on in mind itself, as you lift it up above not only its everyday concerns but also what's it's doing here in the concentration. Ultimately, the goal is something that the Buddha called *lokuttara*, higher than the world, higher than any kind of world. These are the steps that lift you up to that level.