

## *Concentration that Bears Great Fruit*

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In the four bases of success, the Buddha talks about four kinds of concentration: concentration based on desire, concentration based on persistence, concentration based on intentness, and concentration based on your powers of what he calls discrimination, your ability to see distinctions, to analyze things. These are probably not four separate types of concentration, because every state of concentration requires desire and persistence and intentness and benefits from using your powers of analysis. After all, if you don't like what you're focused on, it's hard to get the desire going and it's hard to get concentrated on it regardless of whether you want to be persistent or intent or whatever.

This is one of the reasons why the Buddha offers so many different topics for concentration, so that you can find one that works for you. The breath is the most common one, the one he taught the most, because you can do a lot with the breath. You can change the breath, make it longer, shorter, deeper, more shallow. And it's a process very intimately connected with your sense of the body, so it keeps you anchored right here, right now. So try to find a way of breathing that you really like, and that'll help you settle down. If you have trouble finding the breath, there are alternative topics. You can focus on the parts of the body, the 32 different parts we chant about so often: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, flesh, skin, on into the bones, into the different organs.

This is not necessarily as pleasant a topic, but some people find it really riveting. We've been living with this body so long, taking care of it for so long, and it's *the* big issue in life. It keeps tugging at us: "Feed me, feed me, take me out, take me to the bathroom, let me lie down." You have a sense that your life has been taken over by your body, and for most of us, it has in one way or another. So it can be really fascinating taking the body apart and seeing that there's really not all that much here that's of any worth. This analysis can be used to overcome lust, to overcome pride in your body. Ajaan Mahaboowa has a nice passage where he says it helps you overcome your fear of ghosts, your fear of the dead. Their bodies are just like your body, not all that much different.

This, of course, connects with contemplation of death, the fact that death can happen at any time. Sometimes that can be a very reassuring thought. It wakes you up but at the same time it helps you get a lot the issues in life into perspective—you see that they're so miniscule, so petty compared to the fact that at some point you're going to have to leave this body and then move on, that the issues of this

particular lifetime will fall away. But, of course, if your mind is not trained, it's going to pick up more issues. This is not a contemplation meant to lead to suicide. It just simply helps get a lot of the issues of the day into perspective.

Or you can repeat a meditation word in your mind. The most common one in the Forest Tradition is *buddho*. You think about the Buddha and all of his good qualities, and then gather them into that one word and repeat it, staying with that one word. Think of all the cells in your body saying it silently inside you—*buddho*, *buddho*, or *dhammo* or *sangho*.

So whatever topic that the Buddha lists that you find most congenial, focus on that. When you find it's congenial, that it's restful for the mind, stay with that one topic. Sometimes you can think about the samvega that comes with either the contemplation of the body or the contemplation of death, and that can be restful in the sense it helps again put a lot of the day's issues into perspective. Once the mind can gather there, you let it rest—and then there's work to do.

Because the concentration is centered around a kind of desire, it's an ideal place to see the process of becoming. "Becoming" means taking on an identity in a certain world of experience. If you're staying here in the present moment, that's your world right now. Issues of the past and the future can fall away. It's just you and the breath or you and the body, you and your meditation word. As the Buddha says, you put aside greed and distress with reference to the world outside and you've got just this world in here to stay focused on.

This is what leads to so much suffering: the fact that we keep going from one becoming to another one, all centered around a desire. In your daily life, this process is happening many, many times in the course of sometimes even just a few minutes. You have a desire for something, and the world gets shaped by that desire. If it's a desire for ice cream, the world that's relevant is anything that either helps you get the ice cream or gets in the way. At the same time, your identity in that world is, on the one hand, the person who's going to consume the ice cream; and on the other hand, the person who's going to be able to find the ice cream to consume. So you're both the consumer and the producer or the consumer and the provider. As soon as the desire is fulfilled or you give up on the desire or something else takes your attention, you move on to another becoming.

As the Buddha said, this is the process of rebirth, although he doesn't use the word "rebirth." He uses the word "birth," but basically it's further becoming or renewed becoming. It's what happens not only on the minor level here as we go from one state or imaginary image in the mind to another one, but also as we go out in the world based on those desires actually looking for the ice cream or whatever.

When we can't stay with the body anymore, the mind—if it still has this habit of going to create a state of becoming—is going to find another one. As the Buddha said, consciousness doesn't have to depend on the body; it depends simply on fabrication and craving. It can find a new body that way.

The question is, how does it go from here to there? Actually, consciousness never leaves “here.” It's always “here.” It's just the question of which body is “here” right now for you. It's like the way we go from one dream to another. We're in this dream. The dream is right here, and then suddenly we find ourselves in another backdrop. We're still right here. It's simply that the cast of characters has changed, the scenery has changed. This is how we slip in and out from one life to the next.

As the Buddha said, the craving that leads to becoming is the cause of suffering, so if you want to put an end to suffering, you have to know this process well. And here is our place to observe it, right as the mind gets centered here in this very clear and conscious state of becoming. This is why such an important part of the path is learning how to analyze what's going on as you're in concentration so that you can see that this is what the mind keeps doing. This is how it does it.

This is where the fact of basing your concentration on virtue or fostering your concentration with virtue is so important, because to observe the process clearly you have to be true, and to be true you have to live a life that's harmless. If we harm other people in various ways, we start lying to ourselves about it, and then we lie to ourselves about everything. It becomes hard for us to detect when we're lying and when we're telling the truth.

As the Buddha said, concentration fostered with virtue has great fruit, great reward. Now, he doesn't say you can't get into concentration without virtue. There are many people who can get into concentration without virtue, but then things go awry. Their observation of what they're doing, their understanding of what they're doing, gets skewed.

So our concentration is based not only on desire but also on virtue if we want it to go beyond just the concentration to the point where it has great fruit and great reward. That way, when you can see how the desire leads to becoming, how it leads to suffering, and are really true to yourself about that, that's when you begin to gain some release. You begin to gain some real dispassion for what you're doing, that sense of disenchantment.

The word disenchantment, *nibbida*, relates directly to the Buddha's repeated use of the metaphor of feeding. We feed off the pleasure of concentration as a way of pulling ourselves away from our desire to feed off other things: other people,

relationships, power, status, whatever. But here in the concentration it's still feeding, and we develop a taste for this pleasure so we can be less enthralled by our desire for other kinds of food. That's *nibbida*, disenchantment with things outside, and it requires a certain amount of enchantment here with the concentration.

But there will come a day when you have to say, okay, even this is not enough. To get the mind from there to a point to where it really doesn't need to feed anymore requires a lot of truthfulness on your part.

So find an object that you truly like, and truly be persistent, and be intent on it, and truly use your powers of observation so that you can peel away the various levels of stress and suffering that hold the mind in. Bring it into concentration and then settle in there, and when you're well-settled, you can observe this, too, either as you move in and out of concentration or as you're in the concentration itself.

This is a case where desire is actually a useful and important part of the practice. All too often we hear that the Buddha gives desire a bad rap. It's true that he talks about how certain kinds of craving lead to suffering, but there are also certain kinds of desire—the desire that's part of right effort, the desire that's part of the bases for success—that are actually part of the path. So find a topic that you like, that you truly like, and you can truly stay with so that you can truly observe it, all based on the virtue of your life from day to day, so that your concentration really does bear great fruit.