

The Heightened Mind

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The Thai word for directed thought, *witok*, rhymes with the word for lift: *yok*. So the Thai ajaans will often define directed thought as lifting your mind to the object of meditation; bringing it up to a higher level than its ordinary everyday level. Ajaan Suwat would often begin his talks by saying, “Here we are doing a high level job, coming to high level work, lifting the mind above its ordinary preoccupations, its ordinary duties, and giving it some freedom from those things.” This is a necessary part of the practice.

As you lift the mind, you expand your horizons. You lift it out of the becomings of the day—all the little versions of *you* that are involved in the duties here, the duties there, the ones that are defined by the problems you face in your work, in the family, whatever your duties may be. But as a deva once commented to the Buddha, “We suffer because of our duties.” There’s always that sense of compulsion: This has to be done, and if it hasn’t been done yet, we have to think about getting it done. Inside the little world of that becoming, that duty and that worry are very necessary things. But it’s good for the mind to get out of those becomings. This is why we come to meditate.

Sometimes I have people asking me, when they get so they can maintain mindfulness in daily life: Do they still have to sit and meditate? And the answer is: of course. You need some time out from daily life to expand your mind, because your mind is bigger than the duties of daily life. As the Buddha said, household life is cramped. Even life at the monastery: If it’s defined solely by your daily duties, it gets cramped. The mind needs space, needs to expand itself.

This is why, when we meditate, we have to put aside all thoughts of the day and be very careful not to let them intrude. Try to blot them out with the breath. You can see where they’re forming, what spot in the body is tense as the thought begins to form. Well, breathe right through it. If a picture appears in the mind, blot it out with the perception of light—anything to remind yourself that these things are little states of becoming that you could enter into, but if you waste your meditation entering into those states, you lose the perspective, you lose the opportunity, that comes when the mind is more expansive.

We sit here filling the body with the breath, filling the body with our awareness, filling the body with a sense of ease—and all its tightly-folded little tensions can begin to unfold. Remind yourself that you’re here not for the daily duties, but you’re here for just this—this expansive state of mind. The daily duties are there to support this, but they shouldn’t be allowed to intrude.

When I was in Brazil, someone asked about whether they should keep their eyes closed or open during the meditation, because they had been told that when you meditate you’re trying

to train the mind so that it can deal with the problems of daily life, and because the problems of daily life are things that you see with your eyes open, you should meditate with your eyes open, too.

That's putting the meditation in the service of daily life, which has the priorities all backwards. After all, we're here to solve the problem of suffering which is *the* big problem in life, and suffering is not out there in the world. The suffering is inside the heart, inside the mind in a part of your awareness that nobody else can reach. No one else can sense your suffering. No one else can experience it directly.

You can focus most clearly on it with your eyes closed—or if you meditate with your eyes open, it doesn't really matter, but the important thing is that you remember that this is *the* big problem. And part of the suffering comes from the fact that we squeeze ourselves into little becomings. It's like trying to put an elephant into an envelope, or into a safe: It gets squeezed in, squeezed in, and of course it's going to be miserable. In the same way, the mind when it's made just to serve the issues of daily life is going to be miserable. So we have to make the issues of daily life serve the training of the mind.

This is one of the reasons why we talk about developing the perfections. As you go through the day, it's not just to get the particular job done, it's to develop qualities of the mind like persistence, determination, and endurance. Then you give the mind a chance to rest. "Rest," as the Buddha says, "in renunciation." In other words, you renounce thoughts of sensuality and all the thoughts that go along with sensuality: thoughts of material gain, your status, people praising you. Give the mind something better. You bring it to the pleasure of form, right here, and then the mind can expand. It can get out of those little tiny becomings. Give it this larger becoming, where it can look at the little becomings and see them for what they are. You realize that you don't have to be their servant. You're larger than they are.

Think of the Buddha's images for goodwill: As broad as the earth. As deep as the earth. As broad as the river Ganges. His image for discernment: You're in a tower up high, looking down on people below. It's this enlarged mind that gives you a sense that there's more to life than just getting things done—you're developing perfections.

This is called renunciation because you're renouncing sensuality, but actually it's a trade up. We think of renunciation as a deprivation, but no, you're trading up to something larger, something better. This, too, is a perfection, and it's a perfection that's best practiced while you're sitting here with your eyes closed, while you're doing walking meditation, while you have special time for the mind itself.

Ideally then, you want to take this enlarged state of mind and apply it to the day, as you go through the day. Try to be larger than the problems that face you. Be larger than the issues, larger than the words that people say. But to do that, you need the daily practice of sitting here with nothing else to do, no other responsibilities, no other duties—just the duties of the four noble truths, one of which is to develop concentration, to develop discernment, to develop

your mindfulness, all the factors of the path that things you need right here. In this part of your awareness that nobody else can be aware of. So, instead of being focused on trying to fit yourself into the world, try to see the world as being encompassed by this larger awareness—both the range of the awareness, and also the larger perspective that comes from this heightened, broadened, deepened, state of mind.

That way, the issues of the world don't loom so large, and you've got your priorities straight. *The* big problem is the suffering we cause ourselves. Some people say this is selfish, that you're looking only after yourself. But the way we create suffering for ourselves always spills out on other people, other beings. If we don't take care of this, it's going to keep spilling out.

It's like a broken pipe: The water spills out, spills out... and you go around trying to mop up the water, thinking you're being kind to other people, but the water keeps coming out. You've got to turn around and fix the pipe. If it doesn't keep flowing out like this, then whatever water was there will dry up, and there's nothing new to flood your neighbors. In that way, you're taking care of your main responsibility.

So, it's important to keep that perspective in mind. As you practice mindfulness in daily life, that should be one of the things you're mindful of—the larger perspective, the heightened perspective. After all, we're working on the heightened mind. *Adhicitte ca ayogo*: Devotion to the heightened mind. *Etam buddhana sasanam*: That's the teaching of the Buddha's.

As you heighten the mind, you're creating a refuge. Another meaning of the word *sarana*, which we translate as refuge, is “something you keep in mind.” So you keep this refuge in mind, but also give yourself time every day to work on it—work on this and nothing else. Give this top priority, and you'll be glad for a long time that you did.