

## *Therapy for the Mind*

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The practice of the Dhamma is therapy for the mind. It also treats some diseases that are not mentioned in the psychologists' handbooks. Greed, aversion, delusion—as far as the psychologists are concerned, these things are normal. But the Buddha recognized that they are diseases, illnesses of the mind. And he prescribed, of course, a treatment. Now, this treatment does have some parallels with the way psychologists do therapy. They make a distinction between what's called symptom management and actual therapy. Symptom management is when you calm the patient down. For instance, if their heartbeat is high and their muscles tense, you teach them how to relax.

When we're working with the breath, a lot of that is symptom management. When greed, aversion, and delusion go through the mind, they leave their traces in the body: tightness here, tension there, blockage here. And because the body is so uncomfortable, it's very easy to go running back to the greed, aversion, and delusion again. You don't like being in the present moment, so you create worlds in the mind, little becoming. It's like blowing bubbles. You create a little world and then go inside, and you float with it as long as it holds together. When it pops, you come back and you blow another one. As a result, things don't get cleared out in the body, and you can't stay with the mind in the present moment. Yet the mind in the present moment is where the work has to be done. So when we work with the breath, we're reestablishing this space here in the present moment as our space, a space where it's good to be.

Think of the breath energy coming in all over the body. Wherever there are any patterns of tension, any tightness, any blockage, think of the breath working through. In Method Two, Ajaan Lee offers one map. You start with the breath energy at the back of the neck, going down the spine, out the legs. Breath energy in the middle of the chest going down through the stomach, the intestines. Breath energy going down the shoulders and the arms.

And that's just to get you started. If you look at some of his Dhamma talks from later years, after he had done his guide to breath meditation, you find that he also had other ways of dealing with the breath: thinking of the breath coming in the soles of the feet, going up the legs, up the spine. Breath coming in at the navel and going up the front of the body. There's a breath in the head, the breath going in and out the eyes, the ears. Ajaan Fuang would talk about the breath in the bones. There are lots of different ways of conceiving the breath energy to work

through whatever patterns of tension you may have. The general principle is starting with one spot in the body that you can make comfortable by the way you breathe and then gradually expanding things. Over time, you'll have your own signature way of dealing with the breath.

But it's good to keep in mind the fact that there are many different ways, and sometimes even uncomfortable breathing can be useful for a little while. Back when I had migraines, I found that by breathing in and expanding my stomach to the point where it was uncomfortable helped break out of the cycle of breathing that had been exacerbating the migraine.

So you get to know the breath energy in the body, and the ways to work with it. Learn how to think outside the box a little bit so that you don't get boxed in. This way, you manage the symptoms of your defilements as they're left in the body. It makes it easier to be here.

Then when you're here with a sense of well-being, you can look more carefully at the mind to see what's going on. Why do you play along with these things to begin with?

Now, there are some cases when, working through the breath energy, this sense of well-being right here weakens a lot of your desire to go with greed, aversion, and delusion: You ask yourself, "Why leave this and go create trouble?" That works for some of the weaker defilements. That's where symptom management contains a little therapy. But the stronger defilements will still be entrenched. And this is where you actually have to focus on doing real therapy, and that requires some analysis. After all, the Buddha's talking about cause and effect. If you sit and watch, you can see things arising and passing away. But if you sit there passively, that's all you know: arising, passing away. That knowledge of arising and passing away doesn't count as what the Buddha calls penetrative. It's only when it's penetrative that it's really discernment.

To be penetrative, your knowledge has to see the varieties of different arisings. What arises and leads to skillful qualities? What arises and leads to unskillful qualities? That's penetrative. And for that, you need to start questioning things. Say that lust comes into the mind, and you have your ways of going with it. You have to block them, saying, "I'm not going to go with it this time." Then see how the mind reacts. You start with restraint. You start with mindfulness to hold that restraint in place. But then the discernment comes in when you begin to see, "Why go? What is the mind's attraction here?" Part of it will say, "Well, it's natural. It's obvious." Well, why? In a previous lifetime, you were attracted to other things, different from the ones this time around. So why this?

The mind will be quiet for a while. And then maybe it'll offer a little bit of a reason. You'll begin to see: Is it the attraction to the object? Or is it attraction to the lust itself? Or is it to all the stories you can create around lust, and the different roles you take on in those stories? You can ask yourself, "What's going on?" The fact that you're able to withstand the lust, through your symptom management through the breath, allows you not to fall in line with it. You're going to stay with the body, stay with the breath. Where there's any tension that comes up around the lust, you breathe through it. Don't let it hijack the breath. At the same time, you start seeing into the workings of the mind: where the allure really is. And then you can compare that with the drawbacks.

There's a conversation going on here. There's a certain kind of analysis, because you want to see not only arising and passing away. You want to see what the Buddha calls origination. He tends to use the word origination to talk about things originating in the mind. Why is it that we cling to the aggregates? Well, there's delight. There's an attitude in the mind that welcomes them in. That's the origination. And that's what you're looking for, because you want to see what in the mind is causing all this. When you can take it apart and attack the problem at the causes, that's when the real therapy happens.

So you're dealing largely in verbal fabrication here, having a conversation with the mind—watching it also, though, for mental fabrication: the little blips of perceptions or feelings that are used to justify going with a particular defilement—your lizard brain's contribution to the whole conversation. The lizard brain may not be articulate, but it is powerful.

But there will be a conversation going on in the mind. You have to learn how to run that conversation in such a way that you are in charge, and you have a very clear sense that the defilements are something else. They're not self. You've sided with them for who knows how long, but now you're drawing the battle lines in a different way, and it'll take a while to get used to the new lines.

And don't think that the thinking that's involved in this is a distraction. Yesterday I had a class where someone complained that the analysis of the topic of the class, which was the different kinds of clinging, was awfully intellectual—and that was when I was keeping the terms of the analysis as simple as possible. But it shows that a lot of people come to meditation hoping not to think, hoping that by not thinking, they solve their problems.

But you look at all the Buddha's teachings: They're obviously not the result of a mind that didn't think. He thought, he questioned, he observed. His thinking wasn't abstract thinking. It was thinking around the issues of what's happening right here, right now. "What am I doing right here, right now? What's originating

in the mind right here, right now? And what's the process of running with a defilement? What are the steps?" If you don't think about these things, you're not going to see them. You have to ask those questions. And it's in the asking of the questions that the possibility of therapy comes up, that you can get the mind to be not so inclined to go with its diseases, that it can get closer and closer to what the Buddha would call genuine health.

After all, it *is* possible to find in the mind something that's not fabricated. There's no bodily fabrication, no verbal fabrication, no mental fabrication. But to see that, you've got to clear the fabrications away. And what do you use to clear them away? You use fabrication, the fabrications of the path.

As you clear fabrications away, you find something that's of real value inside. This is what makes it all worth it. This is the state of health. The Buddha calls the first glimpse of this the arising of the Dhamma eye.

What does the Dhamma eye see? "All that is subject to origination is subject to passing away." Notice, it doesn't say, "all that arises." It says, "all that is originated" — in other words, originated from things coming out of the mind. You're watching: This is what's been coming out of the mind. That's one of the more striking things about that experience: realizing how much of your experience is generated in the mind, fabricated from the mind. And the state of mind that we're talking about, the one that sees all that is subject to origination, is one that has also seen something that's not subject to origination, and therefore is not subject to passing away.

When Sariputta had his first experience of the Dhamma eye, he went back to tell his friend, Moggallana. Moggallana saw him coming from afar, and he noticed that Sariputta looked different from what he had before. So he asked him up front, "Have you seen the deathless?" And Sariputta said, "Yes." It's in the seeing of the deathless that you would then look back on all that is originated, realizing that you'd stepped out of all that is originated.

So we're looking at what originates in the mind. That's the focal point of our analysis. That's the focal point of the therapy, because the diseases originate in the mind. In the path of discernment, built on all the factors of the noble path, the discernment is what does the actual therapy. *That* originates in the mind, too. It needs to be nurtured, needs to be protected. You have to learn how to side with it more and more, with what the Buddha calls one of the customs of the noble ones, which is to delight in abandoning and to delight in developing.

You learn how to delight in abandoning your attachment to its old familiar diseases—to recognize them as diseases and then to delight in developing the qualities that can outwit the diseases. After all, the defilements have their reasons,

and they have their clever tricks. They have their strategies for making you fall for them. One of them is, of course, the idea, “Well, this is only natural that the mind has these things.” But take that phrase and turn it around. You say, “That’s all it is. It’s just natural. There’s also something better than natural.” Now, the defilements may say, “Just a little bit, it’s not going to hurt. This practice is so demanding. Can’t I have a little bit of pleasure? I’ll let you just keep coming back that way, coming back.” And you have to say no.

So you have to learn how to fortify the healing voices in the mind, and recognize them as healing. The work of discernment is for the sake of your true well-being, even though it requires going against the grain. But then what is the grain? The grain is “only natural.” So even though the discernment may seem harsh at times, as it comes down hard on your greed, aversion, and delusion, it is compassionate. It is for your own benefit. It is therapeutic. It’s for the sake of recognizing diseases of the mind for what they are, and actually curing them. We’re not just managing the symptoms. We’re finding the root cause of the disease and we’re uprooting it, and then we put everything aside so that we can enjoy true health.

So try to keep this perspective in mind.