

Stay

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Your awareness has different fields. There's the visual field; the aural field—in other words, what you hear; then there's what you might call the verbal field, which is filled with language, what you're talking to yourself about; and then there's the bodily field, the body simply as you feel it, right here, right now. As you close your eyes, you're shutting off the visual field, and with the other two fields you try to get yourself into the bodily field. In other words, you could be listening to the crickets right now, or you could be listening to the Dhamma talk. And the Dhamma talk is pointing you where? It's pointing you into the body.

As for the verbal field, try to devote it to the body as you feel it from within. Direct your thoughts in that direction. If you're going to think, think of how you can stay with the body as much as possible. It doesn't require a lot of intelligence, at least not of the book-learning type, but it does require the kind of intelligence that deals with your defilements—the parts of the mind that want to go exploring other fields. You have to keep reminding yourself of why you want to be here and of the drawbacks of going any place else right now—just enough to get yourself back here, back into the body.

And just now the word “back” there was both an adjective—getting back into the body in the sense of returning to it—and also a verb: back yourself into the body. There's a tendency to think of yourself living up in your eyes, and from your eyes you're going to be looking at the breath. Basically, your awareness is focused toward the front. Try to change that around. Think of yourself backing into the body. When you're aware of the hand, be aware of the awareness of the hand in the hand, the same with the chest in the chest, the foot in the foot, the head in the head. In other words, there's an awareness already there, but the awareness around the eyes tends to blot that out. The eyes take precedence. But here you're trying to return them to being equal with every other part of the body. That allows the other parts to come to the fore.

And think of the body as the whole body. You can go through the body first, section by section, but then you want to put the sections all together. Have a sense that when you're breathing in, the whole body is connected. When you breathe out, the whole body is connected. The whole nervous system is nourished by the breath. All the blood vessels are nourished by the breath. These things are all around you.

Then it's largely a matter of just staying here. There are times when you settle in and you wonder, “Why would you ever want to leave?” It feels so good being right here; you're able to relax all the tense parts of the body. Then there are other times, though, when it seems like the hardest place to be. That's because you're interested in your thoughts. So learn to think about your thoughts in a way that makes them less interesting.

That again will point you back to just the sensation of the body as you feel it in the body.

Resist any temptation to want to go out, any temptation that tells you that you *should* go out. Because when you're dealing with distraction, it's not just the "wants" that are telling you what they want. You have some ideas that say: "You should do this. You should do that. You've got to think about this. You've got to think about that. Here's some free time, why don't you devote it to thinking about something useful—whatever." So watch out both for the desires that will pull you away and the sense of obligation that'll pull you away. Try to deal with these things in as quick and efficient a manner as possible, so that you can get back to just being with the body as it is from within.

The question sometimes arises: Now that we're here, where's the action? The action will come, but it won't come on schedule according to a timetable. You've got to learn how to be patient. Remember, the Buddha began his *Ovada-patimokkha* with the word *patience*, because that's what's going to see us through. The forest ajaans like to give the image of a hunter. You get all your tools and weapons ready, and then you go and sit for a long periods of time, very quietly. But you have to be alert. You have to be quiet so that you don't scare away the animals. You have to be alert so that you'll notice when the animal that you want has come, and you'll be able to take it.

Here you're looking for the animals of your greed, aversion, and delusion. Sometimes they come up very quickly, sometimes not so quickly. All too often, though, they slip in, so you don't recognize them as anything alien. They're part of you: They're *your* thoughts, *your* greed, *your* aversion, *your* anger. Although you don't usually think of them in those terms, just "your thoughts." But if you can pull yourself out of them, you begin to realize that the motive force could be greed, or aversion, or delusion, so you can't let yourself be hoodwinked. You've got to hover around the breath, hover around the body. Once you're here, you've got to protect it, maintain it, because the mind that has been nurtured with concentration gives rise to discernment that's more and more reliable.

It's not the case that you can trust everything that comes up in your concentration, but still, it's a lot more likely to be reliable, and you're also in a better place to judge things as they come up, to see where they're coming from, to turn them around, look at them from all angles. And you know that you've done an especially good job when you look at them in such a way that you can put them aside.

When the Buddha talks about comprehending suffering, you don't simply understand the ideas of suffering or what the Buddha's analysis of suffering was. You get to the point where you have no more passion, aversion, or delusion for your own sufferings. That's what it really means to comprehend suffering—to see that it's not worth it and to agree that it's not worth it. So any thoughts that would head you in the direction of realizing that the things that you're holding on to that are causing you to suffer really aren't worth it, those are thoughts to be encouraged.

But where are they going to come from? They're going to come from this state of mind

where you're watching over the body as it's felt from within, and you're trying to protect it from any thoughts that would be unrelated to the training of the mind. In the beginning, that means any thoughts unrelated to how the breath is going and how comfortably you're able to settle in with the body. Now, part of the mind will complain: "Nothing's happening. This is dumb." Tell yourself: "Okay be willing to be dumb for a while." The people who are willing to be dumb for a while are the ones who get to see things. The people who are constantly convinced of their own intelligence are often quite easy to fool.

So when you can admit that you don't know, what do you have to do? You have to watch. It's when you really watch: That's when you get to see things you haven't anticipated. That's the kind of thing you're looking for: the unanticipated insights, the ones that surprise you.

So prepare to be surprised. At the same time, prepare to have some long stretches when nothing's happening, aside from a sense of well-being, which is not flashy, but it's solid. Try to make this your default space, the place where the mind naturally returns after it's done whatever thinking needs to be done. That will increase the likelihood that new things will come up and you'll be there to see them.