

Refreshment

March 20, 2021

The Buddha has us reflect on the body. As he says, it's nourished by rice, but it's subject to abrasion and wearing down. The same applies to the mind. It's nourished by its food, but it's also subject to abrasion and wearing down. We live in a world where there are lots of very unpleasant things, things that threaten to wear the mind down. We have to figure out some way to find the strength not to be worn down by them.

With the body, when you're young, you don't see the wearing down that much, because the body's good at regenerating itself, so you don't have a sense of how toxic the environment is. But as the body begins to lose that ability to regenerate itself, and you see it wearing down, wearing down, you realize that the environment that nurtures us is also the environment that kills us.

But with the mind, the mind doesn't have to be killed. In other words, its energy and its goodness don't have to be killed. We can keep on regenerating them.

This is the role of rapture in the practice. It's a quality that's not very well defined in the Canon. The commentary talks about five kinds of rapture. I can't remember all of them right offhand, but they include a sense of a chill going through the body, a wave of emotion going over the body, your hair standing on end. In some of the really extreme examples, I know people who spontaneously start chanting or saying things, or their body moves around very strongly. But there are also weaker manifestations, like a sense of fullness. Ajaan Lee talks about this a lot. This relates to another way of translating the Pali term *pīti*, which we usually translate as *rapture*. It also can be translated as *refreshment*. In the factors of awakening, it follows on persistence.

So you have to ask yourself, "What kind of persistence would give rise to a feeling of refreshment?" Having that in mind gives you an idea of where your efforts should go as you're focused on the breath. What kind of breath would be refreshing right now? What way of conceiving the breath would be refreshing? The Buddha says that you develop this factor for awakening by looking for the potentials for refreshment inside and learning how to attend to them.

Ajaan Lee makes the observation that we have lots of potentials in the body and in the mind that we don't make use of, so we should learn how to focus right here to see: What are our potentials? How do we discover and develop our potentials? By looking very carefully at what we're doing. This is one of the

reasons why there's such a strong emphasis in the forest tradition on paying careful attention to what you're doing as you go through the day: all of your tasks in the monastery.

Even simple things like sweeping—there's a right way and a wrong way to sweep. You want to make sure that when you sweep, you don't blow the dust up into the air, and that you actually do a thorough job. There's a right and a wrong way to wipe down a wooden floor, to clean a spittoon: all the very simple things. On the one hand, being very attentive to this makes you look at the details, though it does threaten to get obsessive. But if you're looking for a way to keep the mind from getting away, to keep the mind from getting into abstractions, this is a good way to do it. We tend to think wisdom is a matter of abstractions, but it's not. It's a matter of skill, skill in seeing what is the right thing to do, and why it's right.

Of course, primarily, we should be asking ourselves: What are the right things to do in the mind? You want to be able to watch what the mind is doing while it's doing it. And you get good practice in that by watching yourself as you're sweeping, as you're cleaning up, as you're doing chores in the orchard. Be very close to the body, very close to the activities that you're doing right now. Think about what would be a skillful way of doing them rather than just doing the job to get it over with.

Then you can bring that same attitude into the mind when you sit down to meditate, so that as you're sitting and breathing, you're not just pumping air in and out. You're asking yourself: What's the nature of this energy? Where does the energy come from?

When you breathe in, the air comes in from outside. But the energy originates inside the body. What are the spots where it does? Ajaan Lee mentions a few, but where are the prominent spots in *your* own body, where it seems like as soon as the air starts coming in, there's something radiating from that spot? Look at it carefully. Is there anything getting in the way? What are the spots that are most sensitive to the in-and-out breath? Can you hover around those spots? Watch them. As you breathe in, what does it feel like? As you breathe out, what does it feel like?

Is there any sense of squeezing it at any point in the breath cycle? If there is, stop the in-breath or the out-breath, whichever is doing the squeezing. See if you can keep a sense of being open all through the breathing cycle. This is one of skills we need to develop as we develop concentration. Some people complain about the word "concentration" as a translation for *samadhi*, but *samadhi* is very much a matter of the mind being centered, with all its activities being centered on one

thing. There's something concentric about it. The skill lies in not putting a lot of force and tension on that center that you're trying to maintain. In fact, it's just the opposite: As you focus on the center, think of it as being open.

Whatever good energy is there can flow out. Bad energy, if there's any of that, let that flow out, too. In other words, you're not putting a shell around your center. This is the quality of concentration that you want: centered but open, with no squeeze on that spot. Then you hover around it and maintain it. That's how the refreshment can begin to develop. That spot's not being squeezed. It's not being run over as you go running off to look at something else. You're giving it some space. That's usually the problem: Ordinarily, as we focus on things outside, we don't pay much attention to the energy quality in the body, so we run around, running roughshod over our energy field as we try to focus on other things.

But here we're allowing the energy centers in the body to be open and nourished. When good energy is there, it's allowed to flow out. And you want to see: Are there any blockages anywhere, any walls that you put up around it? Can you think of them dissolving away?

What you're doing is you're allowing that spot in the body to be free from any abrasion from the mind. When it's free from abrasion, it can regenerate itself. That's where the refreshment comes from. Now, as I said, it may manifest through the body in different ways. But what you want is that sense of refreshment. That's what's nourishing for the concentration, because it's only when that sense of refreshment is allowed to spread through the body that the mind can calm down in a way that's not sleepy and tired. It calms down with energy. That's what you want.

So look for these potentials in the body. Keep your attention very close, right here, right here, because otherwise, as you look outside, or think outside, this energy gets trampled on, and no sense of refreshment is allowed to develop. But if you can get in touch with these centers inside and protect them, the refreshment can begin to spread.

This is how you gain the energy to keep on practicing. This, as Ajaan Fuang said, is the lubricant for the meditation. As he said, just as an engine needs lubricant in order not to seize up, in the same way your concentration needs lubricant. Your meditation needs lubricant—this sense of refreshment—so that it doesn't run dry.