

Broad, Tall, & Deep

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When Ajaan Fuang was teaching people to meditate, they'd get to the point where the breath stopped, with a sense of the breath energy filling the body, all the pores of the skin wide open, and all the breath channels in the body connected. Once you had attained that state, he'd have you stay there for a while to get used to being there and to get good at maintaining a subtle perception. Then he'd have you focus on the sensation of space. You'd begin to realize that the space you were focusing on had no limitations. When you're focused on the body, things go out to the skin, or maybe just a little bit beyond the skin, to include the energy cocoon around the body. But with space, there are no limits.

After you were used to staying with that perception of space, Ajaan Fuang would then have you focus on the awareness of the space, which likewise had no limits. There was just the perception of knowing, knowing, knowing.

Ordinarily, he'd have you wait until your concentration was strong so you could stay with these perceptions, and the mind would have the precision, stability, and strength needed to stay with them for a long period of time. But they're useful perceptions to keep in mind even before you reach that level of strength in your concentration. When the body feels weak, you can remind yourself that there's an awareness that's larger than the body, one whose energy doesn't need to depend on the body. When things in your life seem to be crowding in, you can remember that there's an awareness that's larger than all of those things. Keeping that perception in mind, you can get in touch with that dimension for at least some period of time, and that's helpful in a lot of ways.

One, it helps stir up whatever energy you need just to hang on, to stick with things regardless of how bad they are, either in the body or in the world around you.

It also gives you a place to stand where you can simply be aware of whatever comes up. Sometimes things will come up in the meditation and you won't be sure whether they're good or bad, so you want to be able to step back and say, "Let's just observe these things for a while." A larger observer is a really good place to go, because it helps remind you that when you're going to watch something, you want to watch it 360 degrees. You want to look all around you, from every angle, especially when something comes up in the mind and you want to see its effects. You want your awareness to be as broad as possible.

So it's good to practice with that perception. This is one of the reasons why Ajaan Fuang would have his students chant *The Divine Mantra*, because it gets you used to thinking in terms of the properties of the body, along with the properties of space and consciousness. You get more and more familiar with these concepts and find it easier to stay with your perception of whatever sensations might correspond to space, whatever sense of awareness or aspect of your awareness seems to be large. You can take that as your safe spot. It's a good foundation.

The Buddha talks about this enlarged awareness in terms of several dimensions. He talks about making the mind broad and expansive. He talks about making it tall and high. He talks about making it deep. For *broad* and *expansive*, he basically talks about two things. One is developing the *brahma-viharas*: limitless goodwill, limitless compassion, limitless empathetic joy, limitless equanimity. He compares these attitudes to a large river. When people say really nasty things to you, you want to develop a sense of goodwill that's as expansive as the River Ganges, that no amount of nastiness can destroy. You want to cherish this goodwill as a mother would her only child—this ability to keep this determination in mind that you'll always act on goodwill, regardless. When the mind is like the River Ganges, it's imperturbable. Suppose a man came along,

saying he was going to get all the water out of the River Ganges, and he took a torch, hoping to burn it all up, to evaporate all the water. As the Buddha says, the man would just wear himself out before all the water was gone.

So you want to develop that kind of goodwill, a goodwill that nothing can evaporate away. You want your goodwill not to be dependent on other people's being lovable or nice. When you can do that, it's not a case of your giving them something they don't deserve. You have to remember that *you* benefit from your goodwill. You want to make sure that goodwill informs all of your intentions, all of your motivations, so that you don't end up creating a lot of unskillful kamma. When we talk about limitless or immeasurable goodwill, it doesn't mean just that there are no outside limits to it; it also means that there are no conditions placed on it. Whenever it's appropriate, that's what you act on.

Now, there are also times when you have to develop equanimity. Regardless of how much you might want somebody to be happy, it's not going to happen right away. So you have to develop equanimity around that. But again, that, too, has to be measureless, a quality you develop so that you can call on it whenever you need it.

You also want to make your goodwill as expansive as the earth. Just as when a man comes along and says he's going to try to get all the earth out of earth, and he spits here and there, he urinates here and there, and he digs here and there, but he's never going to come to the end of the great earth, for the great earth is too expansive. In the same way, you want your goodwill to be as expansive as the great earth, something that no amount of urinating or spitting can wash away.

The other way in which the brahma-viharas are like a large river has to do with the image of the lump of salt. The lump of salt stands for any past bad kamma you may have. If you can make your mind expansive through the development of limitless goodwill and the rest of the brahma-viharas, then if the results of any past measureable bad kamma come, they hardly even touch the mind, in the same way that a lump of salt thrown into the river wouldn't make the water in the river too salty to drink. You don't want your mind to be the water in a cup, narrow and confined. If all you have is just the water in the cup, then when you put a big lump of salt in it, you can't drink it at all.

But this image of expansiveness refers not only to the development of the brahma-viharas. The water in the river also corresponds to your ability to develop the mind so that it doesn't get overwhelmed by pain, doesn't get overwhelmed by pleasure. In other words, you want your mind to be larger than pain, larger than pleasure. One way of preventing it from being overwhelmed by pleasure is to practice with pleasure. You sometimes hear that strong states of concentration are best avoided because the pleasure is just so seductive that it's going to pull you off the path. But if you don't work with pleasure, how are you going to overcome it? If you just try to avoid it, then when it really hits, you won't have any tools to keep yourself from being overwhelmed by it.

So you consciously use the breath to induce pleasurable sensations wherever you can in the body. In the beginning, this will be just in certain areas of the body, certain channels of the body that you can get comfortable, so focus on those. As they become more and more pleasurable and more and more connected, then further connections will develop, and then more connections and more, until you've got the whole body connected with a sense of ease. You'll come to recognize for yourself the tone that feels easeful throughout the body, and you can go right there. At first it may not be very intense, but if you stick with it, it'll have a chance to grow.

But even as it gets more and more intense, you don't want to focus on the ease as your main theme. You want to stay focused on the breath because your attention to the breath is what produces the ease. Let the ease do its work in the body but don't let yourself get overwhelmed by it or sucked into it. Be determined that you're not going to lose your focus, you're not going to lose your grasp on the breath. That's your practice in learning how not to be overcome by pleasure.

A similar principle works with the pain. As you work with the breath, you may encounter painful

sensations in the body that even good breathing can't dissolve. But you learn how to not let yourself get fastened on the pain, or overwhelmed by the pain. Focus instead on the pleasurable parts of the body. If the whole body seems to be painful, go to the sense of space that surrounds the body, permeating through all the different atoms, and keep your focus there. If you can, consciously erase from the mind any perceptions that tell you there's a limitation to the body—i.e., that the skin is located here, the boundary between the body and the air outside is located there. Just don't pay attention to those particular sensations, or don't interpret those sensations in that way, and you'll find that you've got a large awareness you can back into. The pains will appear within the awareness, but they don't have to overcome it.

Those are some of the ways you make the mind expansive.

As for making it tall or high, the Buddha compares discernment to going up on a tower and looking down on the world below, seeing all the concerns of human beings as they scurry around. When you're looking at them from way up high, they all seem so small. If you can learn to look at your own everyday concerns in the same way, you've heightened the mind. This is one of the terms they use, *adhicittam*, which means that you raise the level of the mind. You've got a higher level of pleasure as your standing point: the pleasure of form. Then you look at the pleasure of sensuality and see that it's got lots and lots of drawbacks. You look at your everyday issues concerning this person or that project or whatever, and you see them in the context of the larger scheme of things. The vision the Buddha had of the whole cosmos on the night of his awakening was a way of heightening the mind, and—from that heightened perspective—understanding the principle of action.

When you can see the principle of action as universal, and that whatever happens in your life is part of this larger play of kammic forces, it helps to depersonalize your everyday concerns. This depersonalization is an important aspect to developing discernment. For instance, suppose you're dealing with people who say nasty things. One of the things the Buddha has you tell yourself if you're hearing someone really lashing out at you, is, "An unpleasant sound has made contact at the ear." We don't usually think in those terms. We usually think, "Why is that person being so nasty to me?" And in doing that, we put ourselves right in the line of fire. Whereas if you can step back and think, "An unpleasant sound is making contact at the ear," you've raised the level of your mind. You can look at the nasty words going right beneath you or right past you. You realize that what that person is saying is his or her own kamma, not yours. It doesn't have to touch you.

The fact that people are saying those things doesn't violate your rights because, after all, they've got a mouth and they can say whatever they want to with it. But you learn how to take yourself out of the line of fire. You can actually feel sorry for those people if they're simply speaking out of greed, aversion, or delusion. If what they have to say is actually true, if you've actually done something wrong, then by lifting your mind to a higher plane, you're in a better position to admit your mistake and to learn from it.

So this ability to depersonalize things is what heightens the mind, raises the level of the mind, so you're up on the tower looking down at people on the ground below, or up on a mountain looking down at the people in the valley, seeing your life in a broader perspective.

As for deepening the mind, the Buddha usually uses "deepening" to refer to arahantship, the point where the mind is so deeply rooted that it's like a stone column sixteen spans tall, eight spans buried in the rock of a mountain. As for the eight spans above ground, no matter how strong the winds come from any of the eight directions—these are the winds of gain/loss, status/loss of status, praise/criticism, pleasure/pain—the stone column doesn't shiver or shake.

Sometimes the Buddha would use the image of depth as in the depth of the ocean. The fully awakened mind is unfathomable like the sea. It's so deep you can't measure it, so big you can't measure it. Even though this technically applies to arahantship, you can hold that perception in mind: that you have a property of awareness larger than everything it knows, that goes deeper than everything it knows. It can encompass everything. Hold that image in mind. And that awareness keeps on knowing regardless of whether the body feels strong, weak, sick, whatever. Ajaan Maha Boowa even advises, at the moment you're about to die and

there's pain in the body, that you try to get in touch with that sense of awareness and ask yourself: "Which is going to disappear first, the pain or the awareness?" The pain is going to go first. As long as you can keep that perception in mind, it gives you the strength to deal with a lot of things that otherwise you couldn't bear. You're less likely to be overwhelmed.

And as you hold this image of a larger, deeper awareness in mind, it's a lot easier to deal with distractions. Instead of thinking of your mind being here and then zipping over there, getting distracted, you realize the distraction is appearing within this field of your awareness. So it's just a matter of allowing the distraction to dissolve, while the awareness remains there, grounded— unaffected, untouched.

These are some of the reasons you work on expanding your conscious sense of the body so that you're sensitive to the whole body as you breathe in, sensitive to the whole body as you breathe out. You try to develop a sense of goodwill that's immeasurable, regardless of what people do. And even though there are times when you have to say No to people, or you have to say things that are displeasing to them, that doesn't mean that your goodwill has shrunk. Because after all, letting people get away with all kinds of nastiness is not being kind to them. You're coming from a larger awareness that's not going to be destroyed by anything, one that can take in the bigger picture and act for the larger good in the long term. That's the perception you want to hold in mind. Even though you haven't yet fully touched that awareness, or don't have a really secure hold on it, the simple fact that you can have that concept and revert to it when you need it helps get you over and around a lot of difficulties.

So practice thinking about your awareness in these terms: broad, tall, deep, what the Buddha calls expanded awareness, the expanded mind, *mahaggatam cittam*, the heightened mind, *adhicittam*. These are some of the key concepts in the practice, the key concepts in the skills you need to get the mind past suffering.