

Constant & Steady

July 15, 2016

Close your eyes and watch your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out.

You want to really stick with it, get the mind concentrated to get some value out of the meditation.

It has to be consistent. Because what we're looking for: the things that happen in the little cracks of the mind, the crack between one thought and the next thought. If you just go blindly from one thought to the next thought, you don't see it. You want to be right here with the breath and you begin to see, "Oh, this is how the mind drops one thought and this is how it picks up another one and this is why it does it." You can see the workings of the mind. But your gaze has to be steady.

The Buddha talks about meditation as being jhana. The word "jhana" means absorption, and it's related to the verb, *jhayati*, which is the same verb that's used for the burning of a steady fire. There are lots of different words for "burning" in Pali, and *jhayati* is to burn steadily, like the flame of an oil lamp. You can actually read by the flame of the oil lamp. With the flame of a woodfire, you can't read by it because the flames flicker too much. That's the way the mind normally is: It flicks out here, flicks out there. You want it to burn steadily.

So stay with one thing. That's how you can read the mind to get to see what's really going on. Otherwise, you don't understand it at all. You hear what the Dhamma says and you hear what the teachers say, but you don't see it for yourself. It's when you see it for yourself and you realize, "Oh, this is why I do that. And this is why it's not all that wise a thing to do": That's how you can drop it.

You catch yourself not only seeing things arising and passing away but also seeing *why* they arise, what's going along with them. That's the important part: what's driving these things in the mind that lead you to get involved with greed, aversion, and delusion, what are the misunderstandings. You can see them clearly. The steadier your gaze gets, the more clearly you can see them.

So try to stay steadily with the breath. Think of this as a flame that's burning very steadily. It doesn't flicker with the wind and it provides the steady light you need in order to understand what's going on inside. That's the kind of quality we're trying to develop as we meditate: steadiness. So see what you can do to keep it going.