

Thinking in Meditation

January 14, 2017

Put aside all other thoughts right now, aside from thoughts about the breath. Be aware of the breath.

Those two go together: You're thinking about the breath and you're watching it at the same time. That helps keep the mind engaged. The commentary you make on the breath has to do with, "Is this a good place to settle down?" If it's not, you can change the way you breathe.

You're responsible for creating a place for yourself in the present moment. No one else can do this for you. The Buddha can give directions, other people can give directions, but you've got to do the actual work. But it's good work, and it's not work that's going to make you sweat or make you tired. It's actually energizing work.

Because the mind needs to rest but at the same time it needs to be clear about what it's doing while it's resting. Otherwise you could just go to sleep and get some rest that way, but it wouldn't really do the work that's needed in the mind. Because resting is not enough: The mind also needs to be clear. And to be clear, it has to clear things away: That's what the thinking is for.

Any other thing that comes up in the mind, you tell yourself that's not for right now. Maybe later but not right now, not now. What is right now is the breath.

Eventually, when things get cleared away like this, then the commentator can relax some its comments and just be with the breath. But it takes a certain amount of thinking to get the mind to a point where it doesn't have to think. Otherwise, all kinds of things come barging in.

Someone once asked Ajaan Fuang, "Meditation is all about emptying your mind, right?" And he said, "No. You can't leave your mind empty. If you leave your mind empty, it's like leaving the door to your house open. Anybody can come in." So first you've got to set up some safeguards, you've got to set up some walls. That's what the thinking is for.

So with the sound of the plane, you tell yourself, "That's not what's needed right now. What's need is the breath." Memories of what happened this morning, plans for what's going to happen for the rest of the day: that's not needed right now, just the breath.

In that way, the mind gets more and more directed here to the breath, and then it gives you the reward of a sense of well-being. That's what some of the

thinking has to do as well. It's not just warding off other things, it's also learning how to relate properly to the breath. Where to focus on it, how much pressure to put on it, how to think about it: All these are things you can adjust. So make whatever adjustments are necessary so that you can adjust to the present moment in a way where you can stay here and are happy to stay here. That way, you can see what's going on.