

Think about What You Say

January 21, 2017

Close your eyes, focus on the breath, and talk to yourself about the breath. How is your breath going right now? Is it too long? Too short? If you have trouble finding the breath, take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths, and notice where the sensation of breathing is strongest. Then allow the breath to find a rhythm that feels good.

This requires that you notice things and you ask questions. The Buddha calls this directed thought and evaluation. It's what enables the mind to settle down, but it's also what enables the mind to talk, which is why right speech is an important part of the practice. If you're chattering away to yourself all day about this, that, and the other thing, then when you sit down to meditate, you're going to be chattering away about this, that, and the other thing, too.

The practice isn't something you do only when you're sitting here with your eyes closed. As you go through the day, you've got to keep control over the mind's chatter. And keep control over the way your mouth chatters as well. As Ajaan Fuang used to say, if you can't control your mouth, there's no way you're going to control your mind.

So you look at the basic principles of right speech: no lying, no divisive talk, no harsh and hurtful speech, and no idle chatter. If you find yourself engaging in any of these things, stop. If you don't, you're going to make it more difficult for the mind to settle down when you finally do close your eyes, and you're also harming the peace of the people around you.

We don't have a vow of silence here, but we do ask that people ask themselves when they're going to say something, "Is this necessary right now? Is it true? Is it beneficial? Is this the right time and place?" A little social grease is enough to keep things going. But a lot of social grease, like too much grease in an engine, makes it difficult for the engine to run. So talk about what's necessary to talk about—what's true, beneficial, timely—and leave all your other thoughts unsaid. And when they don't get said, then there's less likelihood that you're going to be thinking about them. You realize, "Why think about them? I'm not going to be talking about it anyhow." In that way, you get some restraint, not only over your mouth but also your mind, and then that carries into the meditation.

So think about what you say before you say it. As Ajaan Fuang used to say another time, it's better to think about what you're going to say before you say it than having to think about it afterwards. Because when you think about it afterwards it's usually with regret: "Why did I say that? It was a waste of time." Or you find yourself getting involved in needless controversies. But if you watch over your mouth, then the mind that's watching over the mouth gets trained as well.

When the time comes to sit down and you have to talk to yourself about the breath, it will talk about the breath, because it's learned how to think about the things that are worth thinking about and not think about the ones that are not.

This way, the practice goes all through your life, because the same mind that's meditating is the same mind that's running the rest of your life. So try to get it so that it runs both sides well.