

## *Weaponize Good Thoughts*

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

Notice where you feel the breathing in the body, and notice if it feels comfortable. After all, the breath is the force of life, it should feel good coming in and going out. So if it doesn't feel good, see if you can change it. Make it shorter, longer, faster, slower, heavier, lighter, deeper, more shallow to see what feels best. Think of the breath energizing the whole body, nourishing the whole body.

And try to keep your mind here as a safe place where it's quiet. You don't have to think about much when you're with the breath. Other thoughts can go past. It's as if you're lying low, and aircraft are flying above. They can fly wherever they want, but you don't have to get caught up in them. You're here with the breath, you're well-grounded. Your thoughts can fly around as they like but you don't need to get involved.

After all, where do our thoughts come from? They come from all kinds of things—for the most part, from our own greed, aversion and delusion, or from the greed, aversion and delusion of other people. We tend to fill our minds with all kinds of garbage. You turn on the radio you learn news, but in a week that news is going to be old, it's going to be stale, it's not going to be interesting anymore. This is why the Buddha said it's good to have something in addition to a quiet mind in order to protect yourself, because you need something to fight off the thoughts that come from greed, aversion, and delusion that can harm you.

This is why he said one of the protections that you can give yourself is by learning the Dhamma. It puts new thoughts in your mind. The Buddha compares them to weapons: In other words, a thought comes in that's going to get you depressed, you learn how to fight it off; a thought comes in that's going to get you angry you fight it off. Or remember what the Buddha had to say about the need to keep the mind cheerful, the need to keep the mind away from anger. Think about the drawbacks of anger, think about the benefits of having goodwill for everybody. In other words, you have new weapons inside that you can deal with the thoughts that come in.

Just in getting the mind quiet, you have to deal with a lot of thoughts to fend them off. Sometimes the quietness or the sense of well-being that comes from the breath is enough and sometimes it's not. Sometimes the mind is really insistent: It's *got* to think this thought. You have to remind yourself, "Well, no you don't have to, there are better thoughts to think."

And where do we get them? We get them from listening to the Dhamma, get some advice on how to think about things—how to think about anger, how to think about lust, how to think about greed—in ways that these things don't overcome the mind. And when aging, illness and death come in, how to think about them so they don't cause the mind to suffer.

The Buddha said it is possible to have your mind separate from the pain of aging, the pain and the worry of illness, the pain and the worry of death. They can be there, but you don't have to get involved with them. When you don't get involved with them, the worries go away. Usually, you're feeding the worries and then the worries turn around and bite you. It's like an ungrateful animal that you keep in your house. You feed it but it comes and bites you. Your thoughts so many times are just like that. So you need something to fend off these ungrateful thoughts.

That's why the Buddha gives you the Dhamma to learn about how to separate yourself from the body so even when the body's aging, you can remind yourself that the mind is not aging. The body may be growing ill but the mind doesn't have to be ill. The body may die but the mind doesn't die. Remember that. Always keep that in mind so that you don't get too tied up in the pain and the worry that comes with these things.

That way, you've got your weapons inside to protect yourself, and to protect yourself from thoughts coming in from outside. There's so much garbage in the media these days. You need the teachings of the Buddha to remind you that what's *really* important in life is looking after your own mind. The media says that the important things in life are what other people are doing someplace else. Their only concern for you is for you to buy their goods. But the Buddha had a lot more concern for you than that. His concern was, "Why are you making yourself suffer? Here's a way to think, here's a way to train your mind so it doesn't have to suffer."

Even though we're born into a world of aging, illness and death, the mind doesn't need to suffer. That's something you always want to keep in mind. That's your protection.

So as you're getting the mind to settle down, remember part of settling the mind down is learning not to think, but it also requires learning *how* to think. If you have a fund of knowledge that you've picked up from the Dhamma, that'll give you some good ideas about what kind of thinking really will be for your own benefit.