

A Quiet Spot

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Time to let all your thoughts about the outside world just fall away. Whatever you've been thinking about, whatever places your mind has been scattered, just let them drop, and bring your attention right in, right here, right at the breath.

There's a lot of unfinished business out there in the world, but it's always going to be unfinished. One job gets done and another one comes right on it.

A lot of the problem is with the mind itself. There are days when things are perfectly fine, but the mind starts getting antsy. It can't help but think, "What's next there out on the horizon?" If you follow that particular tendency it never comes to an end. There's always going to be work to do. When people say they've finished the job it's because they just get too weak to do it, and so whatever's left has to stay left undone.

So for the time being just leave things undone. Let's create this little 'corner of quietness' in the mind. That's what Ajaan Suwat liked to call *Wat Metta*: a corner of quietness. But he also talked about meditation as a corner of quietness, this place where the mind can really be solid and settled down and have a firm foundation, even in the midst of all the things that are infirm and unsettled in the rest of the world. After all, when we talk about the world it's not just the world outside. The world inside the mind also has a lot of unfinished business. And the urge is to decide, "Okay what business needs doing?"

To decide, ask yourself: "What are the tasks that, when you do them, they really do get done, so that you really do have something accomplished in the mind?" This is why the Buddha was so particular about which questions he would answer and which ones he wouldn't, which issues were worth dealing with, which ones were worth just putting aside. You can't take on everything, so you have to focus on what's important. Have a sense of priorities, not only in your life at large but also in where you focus your attention, where you focus your energy, right here, right now.

So focus on the breath. There are lots of other things you could focus on right here, right now, but you limit yourself to the breath. See what the breath is doing. Is it coming in? Is it going out? Is it comfortable? Is it not comfortable? If the mind wants to analyze things, there's plenty to analyze right here. If it wants

to settle down, just make the breath comfortable and allow the mind to settle down. But do your best to monitor what the mind is doing so that it stays alert and mindful and doesn't go drifting off other places. Keep it right here with the sense of the body breathing in, breathing out. As for everything else in the area of your awareness, just let it go. Take this as your beachhead: This is the spot that you're going to develop.

So you have your spot here in the body; you have this place of quiet and focus in the mind. And there'll be other things going on that you notice. There's chatter in the background in this part of the mind here, in this part of the mind there; this thought comes up, that comes up. And your ability to say, "No, thanks," and just come back to the breath: That's what helps develop this quiet center here.

And don't think that what you're doing is selfish. It's like the monastery: We create a little quiet corner up here in the mountains, away from the rest of the world, but don't think that it doesn't have an effect on the rest of world. It does. The more quiet there is here, the better it is for the rest of the world. And it's the same with your mind. The more quietude you can have in this one spot, the more stillness, the more steadiness you can get going here, the more the whole rest of the mind benefits.

And the people around you benefit as well. Once you've got this quiet spot going then, when you act, you act from this quiet spot; when you speak, you speak from this quiet spot; when you think, you think from this quiet spot. When intentions, when impulses arise in the mind, the observer standing in this quiet spot can look at them and see what's worth acting on, what's not worth acting on. And this way not only do you benefit but, as I said, the people around you benefit as well. They're no longer a victim of your unquiet, unfocused mind.

So once this quiet spot gets more settled, it begins to spread out to affect the rest of your mind. It's like starting a little fire. You may have a lot of brush to set fire to, but in the beginning it's just a little, tiny flame. And you have to be very protective of it because the wind and all sorts of other things will try to put it out. So you have to cup your hands around it, be very protective of it. But once it takes, then it'll spread.

When the Buddha described meditation he used the word *jhana*, which is related to the verb, *jhayati*, "to burn." But it's the burning, not of a wood fire, but of an oil lamp. It's a steady flame that you're trying to get going here. Once the steady flame gets established then it begins to spread, so there's a sense of steadiness and brightness throughout the whole body. As the breath energy gets good in one spot, you allow it to flow to other spots. So the little spot begins to expand, expand, and you find that this still awareness fills the whole body. It feels like the background from which everything else comes and to which

everything returns. But you don't come out or return along with anything. You're right there at the stillness, the sense of expansive awareness.

So even though in the beginning of the meditation it may seem that there's a little fence around the mind, there are restrictions on the mind, it's just for the purpose of getting things established. It's like your hands cupped around the flame that you're trying to light. Once the flame has caught hold of the kindling, then it begins to grow on its own and it grows larger and larger.

So it's not always going to be restrictive. In fact, when the sense of concentration gets solid and begins to spread out through the body you find that it's much more expansive than your ordinary states of awareness.

And it's all right here.

So we start out with this little corner, this little spot. Look after it. Make sure it's still. Make sure it's quiet. Make sure your attention doesn't wander away. If it does wander away, just bring it right back, bring it right back. Its wandering off is a sign that it was blown off by a gust of wind here or there, so you just bring it right back. And do your best to protect this little flame of stillness, this little, still flame you've got going here. Once it catches then it can expand. And the sense of openness and the sense of relief that come with that level of concentration: it's hard to find anything to compare.

But the important part in the beginning lies in doing the groundwork properly because that's where most of the dangers lie. Once those dangers are passed, then things begin to open up in the mind. Of course, there will be other dangers, but the most difficult part in the beginning is just getting the mind to settle down, to become established with a proper sense of balance - not too little energy, not too much energy, just right. And until you get that sense of 'just right' there's going to be a lot of trial and error. Sometimes it seems like trying to balance a ball bearing on the end of a needle: It just keeps slipping off, slipping off. But, finally, once it gets established you realize that it's a lot more solid than you thought. Once you recognize it then you can keep coming back, coming back. You know that spot. This is how the concentration becomes more and more of a skill.