

## *Immediate Knowledge*

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All the things we need how to put an end to suffering are very close things, things we can experience immediately. On the one hand, there's the pleasure and pain we experience. On the other, there's the question of what the mind is doing. What is your mind doing right now? Is there any connection between the two, between what you're doing and the pleasure and pain you're experiencing? That's something you'd think we would know because they're happening right here. You can experience them right here. Yet for most of us, it's a mystery, because our attention is out someplace else.

We have all our theories about the world. We can explain all kinds of abstractions, things that are far away in space and time. Yet the things that are going on in the mind, what the mind is doing, all these activities, all the events in the mind right now, what's the intention, which one is shaping things in the present moment, and what are the things being shaped: Those are things we very rarely know. As for the pleasure and pain that's coming from our present intentions, that's something we very rarely know as well.

This is why it's such a big shift in our values, a big shift in our whole approach to knowledge, to come here and practice the Buddha's teachings, because we have to look very carefully at things we've taught ourselves to overlook, out of the feeling that there's something more important out there, something more interesting out there. Now we're told to turn around and look at things that we've been ignoring all along. It goes against the grain.

But if we have any hope for true knowledge, it has to come from right here. Otherwise, all we're dealing with are concepts and memories, and you know how slippery those are, how arbitrary they can be. Here we're asked to build our concepts out of things that are immediately here, so that we can keep checking them again and again and again, with every present moment. And you can test them: How does your understanding of the mind, how does your understanding of the body, how does your understanding of pleasure and pain, result in more pleasure, more pain? Less pleasure? Less pain? You can check that right here if you pay very careful attention.

This is why we're focusing on the breath. It's something right here, right now. Even if you have doubts about other things, you can at least be confident, when the breath is coming in, you know that it's coming in. When it's coming out, you can know that as well. When you're with the breath, you know what you know,

and you know *that* you know it. That's the beginning of a certain measure of certainty. You can take that as your beachhead. And for the time being, it's all you have to know: Is it coming in? Is it going out?

If you want, you can play with it a little bit to see if it's possible to make it more comfortable. If you find a rhythm of breathing that's really comfortable, try to stick with that.

Right there you're getting your beginning lesson in discernment, learning to discern differences in the breath, and seeing which differences in terms of pleasure and pain are related to your intentions, the way you perceive the breath, or the way you decide that you're going to breathe.

So the beginning point for certainty lies right here as you focus on the breath, as you begin to explore the breath. Try not to let your thoughts wander too far away from here, because when they wander away, they wander into uncertainty. Try to familiarize yourself with this spot right here. This is where the mind and the body meet: right at the breath. This is where intention and feeling and attention and perception—all those factors of name and form—all meet. Even though you may not be able to parse them out yet, at least you know that all the important things you need to know are right here.

Try to make this "right here" the basis of whatever other certainty you're going to try to find in life. Once this problem is solved, the problem of what you're doing that's causing suffering, what can you do to put an end to it, that's what the Buddha's teaching is all about. It's what right view is all about, and the whole path follows from that. Once you've solved this problem, you've solved all the problems that really need to be solved. The mind learns how to just drop all of its old habits that cause suffering, the habits it's clung to over time because it can't imagine any other way of doing things, or it's clung to because it wasn't really paying attention to what it's doing. You can drop all that.

As you drop all that, new things appear in the mind, new understandings, until you get to the understanding that there is a deathless, there's a part of the mind that lies totally beyond suffering. Knowing that is worth more than anything else in the world. And it can all be found right here, if you learn how to look, to look continually, if you learn how to question, and learn how to watch.

You'll find that the meditation tends to go back and forth between those two things: watching and questioning. There are times when you notice that the mind isn't still enough and that's why there's stress. So you try to make it more still. You try to calm it down and just drop any other activity. Stay with that stillness until you get more sensitive to the stillness. Then you begin to realize that even in the stillness there is an element of stress. So you pick up the questioning again to find

out what you're doing that's causing the stress—until you see the intentional element there. Then you drop that and you settle in again.

The practice leans back and forth in these two directions of settling in and then questioning, settling in and then questioning. It's like walking. Sometimes you lean a little bit to the left, sometimes a little bit to the right. Your left foot steps, your right foot steps, but the left foot and the right foot are part of the same body. They're part of the same process, the walking.

And here, as Ajaan Lee says, we're walking in place, like soldiers on a parade ground, stepping in place. The difference is that they're stepping in place in a way that doesn't accomplish much, but our way of stepping does. We get more and more familiar with this spot right here, more familiar with what the mind is doing, more familiar with what results from what it's doing. This way, your intentions get more refined, the pleasure you gain from this process gets more refined, until you can finally reach the point of no intention, because you don't need intention any more. Up to that point, there's always something lacking, so you always need to intend to do this, to choose to do that. But finally when everything gets so refined that there's no more need for intention, you can let it go, and it just falls away.

This is something else that's going to happen right here. If you pay attention, if you're observant, if you learn to ask the right questions, if you learn to watch carefully, everything opens up right here. All your doubts are resolved right here. Once your doubts about right here are resolved, you begin to realize that doubts about anything else are really not important—because resolving this doubt takes care of every genuine problem you have.