

## *Gladden, Steady, Release*

*August 28, 2011*

There are three things you want to check for if you want the mind to settle down:

First, does the mind need to be gladdened? Is there something you have to do in order to lift its spirits, so that you're feeling no regrets about the past, no worries about the future, so that you can feel good about being right here?

The second thing you need to check for is if the mind needs to be steadied. Does it keep slipping out after other things? Thoughts of the past, thoughts of the future? How can you let go of those things and keep the mind right here?

The third step is to see if the mind needs to be released from anything, if there's any burden that's weighing it down, preventing it from settling in, any way that it feels trapped. How can you get it out of the trap?

So check your mind to see what needs to be done right now.

If you find that your energy is down or your sense of confidence is down, do what you can to gladden the mind.

Part of this has to do with the breath. Notice how the breath feels right now. What would feel really good right now? What way of breathing would feel good in your most sensitive parts, say, of the torso, your chest, your abdomen?—any of the places where you're really sensitive to how the breathing feels. The parts of the body that need breath energy right now: Can you give them some energy?

That can make the mind more enthusiastic to be here.

As for your worries about the future, you have to learn how to put those aside. Reflect on how you handled difficult things in the past successfully. If you've never allowed yourself to congratulate yourself on how you handled things, well, now's the time.

You begin to realize that there were times in the past when you actually handled things okay. You got through difficulties. It was okay. So the things you're worried about in the future are probably things you can handle as well. You have to have that confidence.

What will you need in order to handle things in the future well? You'll need a lot of mindfulness and you need a lot of alertness—which is what you're developing right here.

So when the mind keeps eating away at you, saying, "You've got to think about this, worry about that, plan for this. What if that happens? What if this happens?" remind yourself that the future is a very huge unknown territory: All kinds of

things could happen. The only way you can really be prepared for the future is to try to develop as much mindfulness and alertness as possible. Those are the qualities you'll need to deal with the unexpected. Your ability to observe what's going on: That's a quality you'll need to deal with the unexpected, to notice what's actually happening. And how do you best prepare for the future? You prepare for the future by developing these qualities right now. That's what we're doing as we meditate.

So with the part of the mind that keeps eating away at you—that wants to worry about the future and warn you about the future and get upset and get afraid of the future—remind yourself: Your best preparation for the future lies in these qualities that get developed as you stay with the breath, as you focus on the breath.

This is your safe place. If you stay here long enough, you can develop a sense of ease, a sense of well-being that nobody else can touch. Nobody even has to know that you have it. But you know inside, you know how to care for yourself inside. That gives you the confidence to deal with whatever's going to come up.

As for steadying the mind: One of the best ways of doing this is to remind yourself that the things your mind is going out to feed on are really unreliable.

This is where whatever ways you have of developing a sense of samvega become important. If you're attached to thoughts about your body or somebody else's body, remember what happens to bodies: They grow ill; they get sick. You can't really depend on them.

If you're attached to things being a certain way: Again, that's really undependable. The only thing that's dependable right now is the fact that you're right here. You've got the breath. And again, you're going to need these skills. This is something a lot more reliable, a lot more dependable. You're training yourself to be a more dependable person, more trustworthy to yourself.

Those are thoughts that can help steady you.

As for releasing: What are the burdens that weigh you down? What are the things you carry around with yourself all the time, and you don't feel quite right about letting them go? Tell yourself, "It's okay. You can put them aside for the time being. Put them down on the ground. They're there if you ever really need them."

As the mind gets more quiet, you might ask yourself, "What's keeping it from getting even quieter?" This is where you begin to peel away all the unnecessary layers in your concentration.

Ajaan Fuang has an analogy of pouring concrete. You need the forms in order for the concrete to set properly. As long as it's still liquid, you can't take the forms away. But as the concrete hardens, then you can take the forms away and the concrete will stay in place.

It's the same with the concentration. In the beginning you have to think about the breath, think about the mind, adjust this, adjust that. There comes a point where you've got everything adjusted. You don't need to do any adjusting anymore, and what's keeping you from really becoming one with the object is the fact that you're still fiddling with the object, fiddling with the mind, fiddling with this, that.

Just tell yourself: "It's perfectly okay. Just plunge into it."

The image in the Canon is of a lake with a spring. You plunge into the lake and let the cool water of the spring surround you. If the motion of the water gets too oppressive, you can think of it being really still, very serene.

This way, you start peeling away all the unnecessary things and get the mind really centered, really one.

So check your mind each time you meditate: What does it need? Does it need to be gladdened? Give it some good breathing; give it some good thinking.

This is why the Buddha has us think about our past generosity, our past virtue, whatever we can think of that gives us confidence that we are competent to settle in and find some peace of mind right here.

Do what you can to steady the mind, to keep it really firmly here. Any attachment to anything that would pull you away, just learn how to drop it, drop it, drop it.

And you find at the same time that you're beginning to release yourself from a lot of the burdens that you've weighed yourself down with. Sometimes just seeing them is enough to drop them. Other times, you have to analyze them, work with them, to the point where you realize you really don't need them anymore, you don't want them anymore, because they're causing unnecessary stress.

It's in this way that you get the mind trained to settle down and really be at peace.

So as you're meditating, it's not just a matter of looking at the breath. You have to check the state of your mind and work with it so that it's willing to settle down.

And these skills for giving yourself encouragement when the mind needs gladdening, and for teaching yourself a few lessons about samvega when it needs to be steadied: You can take these lessons into the rest of your life.

A lot of this has to do with how you talk to yourself.

Unfortunately, many of us talk to ourselves in the same ways that a lot of unskillful people have been talking to us throughout our lives. We have to remind ourselves: We don't have to identify with those kinds of speech. Train yourself in new kinds of speech.

This is why it's good to listen to the Dhamma, why it's good to read the

Dhamma. It teaches you new ways of talking to your mind, ways that are actually good for you.

One of the nice things about the Buddha's teachings is that its range of shoulds, the tasks that the Buddha sets for you, are based on giving rise to true happiness. There are a lot of other shoulds out there in society that have nothing to do with your happiness. They're simply what other people want to force out of you. If you internalize those shoulds, you're going to suffer.

But the Buddha's shoulds are different. You should learn how to comprehend suffering. You should learn how to abandon the cause of suffering, to develop the path so you can realize the cessation of suffering. These are all shoulds for your true well-being. These are friendly shoulds. So learn how to give them more space and more power in your mind.