

## *The Quality of Your Awareness*

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We're looking for something that's right here. So why is it that we haven't found it? Think about how you look for physical objects. If you can't find something you've lost, something you've dropped, the first thing you do is try to figure out where you might have dropped it. Then you go looking there. If you can't find it, you've got two choices. One is to look in other places. And the other is to go back and look over the same places you've been looking, but to look more carefully.

It's the same with the meditation. We're looking right here in the present moment. One way of seeing more clearly what's going on here, of course, is to look more carefully. You have to think about the quality of the attention you're paying here right now. Think of when you're listening to a piece of music and you're trying to listen for the inner voices, say as when you're listening to Bach. You have to make yourself very quiet and try not to get disturbed or distracted by the outer voices. It's an issue of the quality of your attention.

It's also an issue of where you're focusing it—in essence, the questions you're asking. But before you ask the questions, try to make the mind very, very still. Make yourself very still. This is why we try to get the breath to calm down.

One of the Buddha's very first instructions in breath meditation—after you've been watching the breath for a while and trying to be aware of the whole body—is to try and look around. To do that, you try to calm the breath. You may have noticed that if you're listening for something very subtle—say a noise that's far away—and you make yourself quiet, it's not just a question of quieting the mind. You also have to quiet the energy in the body so that you can hear more clearly.

The same principle applies here. You allow the breath to grow more quiet, more serene. The word “serene” here connects with one of the factors for awakening. You try to quiet down the movements of the breath. You also try to quiet down the feelings and perceptions in the mind. In other words, figure out how you might conceive of the breath, how you might picture the breath to yourself, to allow it to become more quiet and to allow the mind to become quieter too. As things grow more quiet, then you begin to see that, at least in the body, you begin to pick up on patterns of tension you missed earlier when the breath was coarser or more blatant.

Areas where you didn't look: That's the other part of finding something that you've been looking for—looking in places you haven't looked before. Pose the

question, when you're focusing on the breath, "Which parts of the body get blocked out?" The mind does have this tendency, when it's focusing on one thing, to block out other things. It creates blind spots. Where are your blind spots right now? How do you notice your blind spots?

Ajaan Suwat once made the comment that if you want to see ignorance, look at where things are being fabricated. Right there is where you're going to find ignorance. So try to notice what's being fabricated and where is it hiding? What is it hiding? This is one of the reasons why we try to create a whole-body awareness that gets us used to having the quality that the Buddha had in full, which was, as they say, the All-around Eye, *Samanta-cakkhu*. You want to learn how to look all around and make those blind spots smaller and smaller. Then look *into* those blind spots if you can. Sometimes you have to back into them.

If you think of your mental vision pointing in one direction, you have to ask yourself, "What's behind the eye of the mind?" Figure out some way of turning around and looking in the back spots.

So part of the issue is making the mind more quiet. Part of it's looking into places. And the other is having an idea of what you're looking for. This is why the Buddha defined appropriate attention as attention to the proper questions. It's like looking for certain kinds of mushrooms in the forest. You can look and look and look in an area where there are lots of mushrooms, but if you don't have the right image in your mind, you won't see them. But if you suddenly get the right image in mind, then you to see them everywhere.

It's same with the causes of suffering. They're all happening. Just realize that's what you're looking for.

You want to look in the movements of the mind that are impelled by craving of various kinds. Look in the areas where you find there's a sense of being oppressed or burdened by something in the mind. How are you going to see that? One of the clues is to look for inconstancy. The Buddha says to hold the perception of inconstancy in mind. It's not enough simply to say, "Oh yeah, he's right. Things are inconstant." Everybody knows that. There's change going on all the time.

The point is in seeing where's there an inconstancy in the level of stress or pleasure that you're feeling. When you can detect that things go up or down with your little inconstancy meter, what else happened in the mind? What other movements were there? They're happening all the time. Like the mushrooms in the leaves in the forest: They're hiding in among the leaves and they're right there in plain sight. It's not like they're under the leaves. They're just mixed in with the

leaves. But you have to have the right perception, the right idea of what you're looking for. Only then will you see what's in plain sight.

So when we look for inconstancy, this is what we're looking for: to see where there's the rise and fall in the level of stress and so that we can detect, "What was the movement that caused the rise? What was the movement that caused the fall?" We're not here to come to general conclusions about the nature of reality. We're here to look at why there's suffering, and where it's coming from right here, right now. So you want to look at the particulars.

So you're learning how to develop the quality of your attention in these ways: one by making things very quiet; two, by looking in places where you haven't looked before, trying to find where your blind spots are and trying to figure out ways of looking into the blind spots; and then three, having some idea of what you're looking for. What is this that we're looking for inside? We're looking for the movement of intention to see where it causes stress, to see what kind of intentions let go of stress.

We follow that trail deeper and deeper into the mind until we find out what's really causing all the problems. That's how we find what we're looking for.

So it's a matter of that quality of your attention. This is why we practice concentration. This is why we pose questions in the mind to learn about the mind as it's entering concentration. Because what else are you going to observe? You observe the mind in action right here. And that's where everything becomes plain.