

## *Take Your Time*

*October 15, 2012*

When you start meditating, you want to make sure you're in the mood to meditate. Your mind is ready, you see the value of training the mind, and so you can focus in on the breath.

But sometimes you find that it takes a while to get into the mood, and that's perfectly fine. If there are mental habits or ways of thinking that get in the way of the mind settling down, sometimes you have to spend an hour or so sorting them out.

Part of the mind says that you've got to think about your work, or about a particular problem in the family. Or if it wants entertainment you've got to argue with it. First listen to it, see what its case is, and try to find the holes in its argument.

If you're willing to take time with this, you find after a while that you begin to recognize the patterns of the arguments, and you get quicker at seeing where they're really not all that convincing. You notice especially the ones that come on with a lot of force yelling at you: Those are the ones who are really lacking in reason.

Years back when I was working on the revisions to *The Buddhist Monastic Code*, I was receiving criticisms from different parts of the world. People who didn't agree with this or that interpretation: I found that if their points were well-taken, if they had a clear basis in the texts, they usually tended to be fairly decent in their tone of voice. But when they got insulting and nasty, it was usually a sign that the argument was weak, and they were trying to make up for the weakness in the argument with the amount of disdain and contempt that they were showing, thinking that somehow that would push me into their camp.

Well, this kind of behavior occurs not only between people. Your own mind does that to you as well. Voices in the mind that tend to be awfully pushy are usually the ones that don't have much reason behind them, so you have to learn how not to let yourself get pushed around by them. You have to recognize where their weakness is.

Then you offer your reasons for why you should be meditating. It's good to be thinking about that for a while because you've got to strengthen those members of the committee, the ones that want to meditate.

If you're willing to take some time to sort things out like this, you're developing a quality that actually gets useful in the practice of concentration: evaluation, learning to evaluate all the problems that are going to come your way. The phrase in the formula for right mindfulness, "putting aside greed and

distress with reference to the world,” that’s one of the functions of evaluation.

So if you find that that’s what you’ve got to do, do it. Even if it takes up the whole hour and you’re not with the breath all that much, still learning how to think things through like this, is an important skill in the meditation: appropriate attention. The more you do it, the more quickly you can get to the point.

You’re also working on that phrase that’s at the beginning of the description of right concentration: “secluded from unskillful qualities,” *vivicce’va akusalehi dhammehi*. You’re putting up a protection against the things that would pull you out of the concentration. What are those unskillful qualities? They start with wrong view and go through wrong resolve, wrong speech, wrong action, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness. In other words, you’ve got to clear away all the wrong versions of the path. Then you can get the mind into right concentration.

Of course, clearing the unskillful side away is not enough. You have to replace it with the skillful side. So, for example, if you’ve got an argument where you say, “I can’t think about the breath right now, I’ve got to worry about tomorrow or hash over the events today in the office,” you can apply right view. Right view says, “Well, tomorrow is pretty uncertain, but you do know you’ll need skillful mental qualities to deal with it. How are you going to develop them? By meditating.”

As for hashing over the events in the office, things that other people said, remember that it’s their karma. If there are things you said or did, you have to ask yourself, “What’s the lesson I can draw from those? If I made a mistake, how can I learn from that?” Take a little time to learn from it, resolve that you’re not going to repeat the mistake, and then spread lots of goodwill to yourself and to everyone else.

That gets you right into right resolve. You don’t want to harm yourself. You don’t want to harm anybody else. Firming up that resolve makes it easier to follow through the with all the other factors of the path. Then you arrive at right concentration.

If you have a teacher you respect, ask yourself: “What would the teacher say about these events?” When I was staying with Ajaan Fuang the first couple of years, I had lots and lots of questions. Then I found that as time went on, as soon as a question would come into my mind, my first thought would be, “Let’s take this to Ajaan Fuang,” but then the second thought was, “I know exactly what he’s going to say, so why bother him?” Occasionally I’d test it. But you find after a while that if there’s someone you really respect you do begin to pick up their habits and their point of view, and that’s an important part of the meditation. You’re getting some skillful voices in your mind. So try to absorb their perspective on the things that normally consume your thoughts.

What this means is that if getting the mind in the mood to meditate takes the whole meditation session, that's perfectly fine. You'll have another meditation session tomorrow, or later today. With each session, you should get quicker and quicker at dealing with these things so that they take up less and less time. When you get skilled at dealing with them, you find that it gets a lot easier simply to get the mind to settle down right away and it'll stay that way, even when you leave the meditation. Because even the slightest thought that would pull you away is something you've already seen through.

There's a phrase they have in Thai that something is as transparent as a shadow-puppet's screen. Everything just shines right through the puppet screen. You see it all. And you want your thoughts to be that transparent, so that you can see where they're coming from. You can recognize: "Ah, this one is coming from greed and this one is coming from wrong view and this one is coming from wrong resolve." That really undercuts their power, until you find it easier and quicker to get in the mood and stay in the mood to meditate.

Then your mind is fully ready to work with the breath.