

## *Creating a World of Concentration*

*May 11, 2013*

The Pali word for meditation, *bhavana*, literally means to develop or to make something come into being. We're trying to bring into being a state of concentration to begin with, and it requires two qualities of mind—one is serenity and the other is insight—to try to calm the body down, calm the mind down.

There are basically two ways of doing this. One is just to give the mind something to focus on that it likes, and it'll settle down on its own. But if it doesn't settle down on its own, you've got to figure out what it's attached to. In other words, you have to use some insight to get the mind to settle down. If you see that your thoughts are going to a particular place or a particular issue, you've got to figure out how to cut that issue through.

That's one of the reasons why we have these contemplations at the beginning of the meditation—there's the contemplation of aging, illness, death, and separation; there's the contemplation that the world is swept away, it does not endure, it offers no shelter, and there's no one in charge—to develop a sense of distancing yourself from the normal affairs of your daily life, to pull yourself out of the world of your normal concerns and bring yourself into the world of the meditation here.

That word *bhavana* is related to the word *bhava*, which means becoming—a state of mind. It's a particular state in which you take on an identity in a particular world of experience. We create all kinds of worlds as we go through the day. And night: Think about all your different thought worlds, dream worlds when you sleep. Well, we're creating a world here, too. We're developing a world with our concentration. Part of the way we do that is to make this really interesting, and the other part is to make other things *not* interesting.

To make this little world here interesting, you work with the breath. That's what you've got right here. You realize there's a lot more to the breath than just in and out. There are different qualities of breathing, different layers of breath energy in the body. You focus on the obvious breath coming in and out, and after a while you begin to realize that there are other energy movements in the body. Some of them will immediately seem relevant or related to the in-and-out breath. With others, you realize that they're related only as you begin to settle down, and your powers of observation get more and more subtle.

So focus on whatever breath energy you can notice right now, see where it's moving, and ask yourself if you could allow it to move in a way that's more nourishing or more relaxing or more whatever the mind needs, whatever the body needs. That creates a point of interest right here. It helps you to settle into this world of the mind in the body.

Then you can think about the fact that as you work with the breath, you're working with the basic energies of life. The breath is what keeps the mind and the body together. As you work with the breath, it's going to be good for the health of the mind, good for the health of the body. It's medicine, the kind of medicine that's like a cream for a rash. You put the cream on the rash and you don't immediately wipe it off. You allow it to stay there and do its work.

It's the same with the breath. Allow the breath to soothe the mind, soothe the body or energize the mind, energize the body—whatever is needed right now. Give it some time so that this world of your concentration has a chance to develop. It doesn't matter if it's developing slowly. Sometimes things that develop slowly are more lasting than things that are quick.

So allow your awareness to seep down in the body, and think of the more subtle aspects of the energy flowing in the body. Try to be aware of them. That also allows the mind to seep into parts of the body that it's usually too busy to inhabit. Now that it's not busy with anything else, you can inhabit the body fully all the way down to the little, tiny blood vessels in your toes and the little, tiny blood vessels in your fingers or your ears. You want to fully inhabit this world here: the world of the breath in the body, right here and right now.

As for your identity in this world, you're partly the doer who's telling the mind what to do and giving some suggestions to the breath, and partly the observer to see what's working and what's not working. What parts of the body have you been ignoring? Once the mind settles down with the breath, you can start doing a survey: down the back, out the legs, starting again at the back of the neck, going down the shoulders, down the arms. Get down to all the little muscles around your face, around the eyes, anywhere you notice that there's any tension that's unnecessary or that's pulling you out of a nice, aligned posture. Allow those muscles to relax. Give them a little space, take the pressure off them, and give them some space to relax into.

Now, as you do this, you're developing important qualities of mind. As I said, there's the sense of serenity or tranquility, and there's also insight as you're beginning to see how you relate to the breath. You begin to notice what mental pictures you have of the breath process. With some mental pictures, as you hold on to them, the breath gets harsh. With others, it gets more refined.

You can think of the breath as an energy that can go through anything. Sometimes if there's a pattern of tension someplace in the body, you may have the assumption that if it's tight there, you can't go through it. You've got to go around it, or you get blocked by it. But if you hold in mind the idea that energy can penetrate anything, you find that you're not blocked by tight muscles here or patterns of tension there. This allows the breath to get more subtle. It allows your mind to move into parts of the body that were previously blocked. You can really settle down, settle down. So you're using insight *and* tranquility together here.

You're also developing four qualities that the Buddha said are necessary for the meditation to work. The first is the desire. You really want to do this. As you stick with it, that's the second quality: persistence. You have to motivate yourself to stick with it. You have to take an interest in what you're doing to see that there is something interesting here, and then really being intent on what you're doing, trying to do it well. That's the third quality.

The fourth is that you use your powers of analysis. These powers cover all the active activities of the mind where you're trying to figure things out: If the breath doesn't feel comfortable, you can ask yourself, "What would be more comfortable? What would feel better?" You come up with some ideas; then you test them. If they don't work, go back and try to come up with some new ideas. This is related to the quality of ingenuity. When one approach doesn't work, you back up for a bit and ask yourself, "Okay, what am I doing wrong here? Why didn't that work?" And then you try something else.

So you've got desire, persistence, intent—where you're really interested in something, pay careful attention to it—and then finally, the more active qualities of analysis and ingenuity. These parallel the four ways in which you build worlds in your imagination. First, there's the ability to create a world through desire. Then you maintain it—that's the persistence. The intentness is where you investigate and look at your world very carefully. The fourth quality is when you make adjustments. Then you go back and look at it again. Back and forth like this, all four of these qualities help one another along as you develop this world of concentration right here.

All too often, you hear meditation described as a process in which a lot of your mental faculties—such as thought or imagination—are not allowed. But for the mind really to be trained, you have to engage everything. You're both the observer and the doer. You focus on doing something and then you watch. You analyze what's going on, and then you watch the results of your analysis. You're working with something simple. This is where the limitations are: You're not going to be

working with anything but the breath and your present awareness of the body—at least for the time being.

There will come a time when you take these skills and apply them to other thought worlds that come into the mind—the ones that the mind tends to gravitate to, that seem to have a magnetic power over it, that pull it in, pull it in. You can begin to see: Okay, what's the magnetism there? What's the pull? And you can work yourself free from it. But the first thing you need to do is to develop this world here, the world of the breath wherever the mind and the body meet in the present moment so that you've got a frame of reference to see the other worlds of the mind, to see their movements and the stress that they create.

That's how concentration helps to develop insight. It makes you more sensitive to what's going on in the present moment, and in particular to what you're doing in the present moment. You become very, very particular about having a really pleasant, easeful place to stay here. As soon as there's a disturbance, you notice it: things that before didn't bother you at all, that were simply a normal part of living in this world. But now you're creating another world where there's a greater sense of well-being right here in the present moment, so you've got something to compare. And you can raise your standards as to what level of well-being you'll accept.

So for the time being, work on building this world, developing this world, bringing it into being. You develop tranquility. You develop insight. With all that doing and observing, parts of the mind learn to work together—and that's how the whole mind gets trained.