

## *Don't Leak Out Your Ears & Eyes*

*February 4, 2014*

We sit here with our eyes closed, trying to gather our attention inside to be with the breath, thinking of the breath as a whole-body process: the energy flowing through the nerves and the muscles that allows the air to come in, the air to go out—the oxygen exchange that helps keep us alive. And this can be very nourishing.

The trick is: How do you do this when you're not sitting here with your eyes closed? We try to maintain some sense of being in the body. Don't let your attention flood out your eyes and your ears. Or as Ajaan Lee says, don't let it *leak* out of your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, thoughts of the past, or thoughts of the future because if you do, you feel depleted inside. You feel a sense of lack, a sense of hunger. And that makes you want to get more things out of your eyes and ears, nose, tongue, body, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or thoughts. But they're never big enough.

That's another one of Ajaan Lee's images: that our eyes are way big, and the sights seem to be very small. There's never enough of them, so we just keep stuffing them in, stuffing them in. The same happens with sounds and the other sensory impressions. This destroys our concentration. And it's hard to tell which happens first, whether the concentration is destroyed first or the hunger comes first.

You've got to learn how to combine your meditation with restraint of the senses. Now, restraint of the senses works when you have a good sense of being mindful of the body. This can either be mindful of the breath as a source of nourishment or mindful of the 32 parts of the body, especially when you're looking at beautiful bodies outside. You remind yourself: What's beneath the skin? What's beneath all the coverings? The same things as are in your body.

But whichever form of mindfulness immersed in the body you practice, you've got to use it as your foundation post. That's the Buddha's image. He says our mind is like six different kinds of animals, and they all go off in their different directions through the six senses. If you were to tie them all to a leash, but there was no post to tie the leashes to, then the animals would just get pulled in the direction of whichever animal happened to be the strongest. You have a crocodile, and it's strong; it's going to pull all the other animals down into the water. Many of them will drown. But if the bird is strongest, it's going to pull all the other animals up. And again, many of them will starve. What you've got to do is find a good post,

and this is what mindfulness of the body is, so that you have a sense of inner nourishment to resist the mind's tendency to go looking for food in the six senses.

This is where the breath is especially helpful. It gives you a sense of nourishment, a sense of inner well-being, a sense of energy you can build up inside. That's what the rapture, the refreshment is for. And then you're careful as you go through the world to maintain that sense of rapture and refreshment, having it fill the body. Don't let that energy go leaking out your senses.

This doesn't mean that you don't look at things outside. It's simply that your eyes and ears are not so big that they have to keep gobbling down sights and smells and whatever. Just notice what needs to be noticed and don't go trying to stuff a lot more in than is really needed. If you can maintain the sense of fullness inside without letting it leak out, then the sense of being centered gets maintained. The sense of being nourished gets maintained. And you can deal with the world without being so hungry for all these things.

This is one of the ways in which you protect yourself. You protect your kamma. You protect your concentration. So try to develop the sense of well-being inside and learn how to carry it around.

Another image the Buddha gives is of a bowl of oil balanced on your head. With that sense of fullness, you don't want it to spill. Let it stay balanced inside.

So working with the energy in the body is not just a way of resting from time to time. It's also your nourishment, and you can maintain that nourishment as you go through the day. Too many people learn skills on the meditation cushion and then just leave them there. You've got to realize that you carry these things with you. You're learning these things because you need them throughout the day.

When you wake up, you want to get in touch with your breath—first thing. Think of the breath energy being washed through the body. Before you go to sleep, this should be the last thing you're thinking about: getting centered inside, getting nourished inside. That way, you're not so hungry for things outside. People's addictions come from the sense of a lack inside. They know that no matter how much they stuff in from the outside, it's not going to be enough. But they can't stop, because they let everything leak out through their eyes and ears and nose and tongue and body and mind. So they just keep stuffing things right in without stop.

Like the coyotes around here: Have you ever noticed their scat? When there are slim pickings in terms of the food available to them, they'll eat anything. I've seen coyote scat that has plastic rope in it. The rope gave the coyote something to chew on, something to swallow, but there was no nourishment there. And that's the way it is with most sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. They

don't give you that much nourishment. They're like junk food. They're salty with some fat, and bad for you, but whatever nourishment they can provide goes away very quickly. There's not much left.

Ajaan Suwat used to like to ask, "The pleasures you had last week: Where are they now?" They're gone. They go as you try to gobble them down. And because they don't provide any satisfaction, you keep gobbling more down and more. You end up developing a lot of bad habits in the mind.

So work on developing a sense of fullness with the breath. The word *piti* can be translated as rapture or refreshment, but Ajaan Lee would emphasize it again and again as a sense of fullness. You might want to start with your hands. Simply relax all the little muscles and connective tissues in your hands, and let them stay relaxed as you breathe in, relaxed as you breathe out. Don't let them tense up even the least little bit with the in-breath. And as you stick with that for a while, there will be a sense of fullness in the hands. Then allow that sense of fullness to start seeping up your arms into the torso. Then start with your feet and have it work up your legs.

There may even be a sense of floating here, as the fullness gets really intense. In the beginning, it's not going to be all that strong, but you give it some space. You give it some time. And there will be a sense of nourishment. Then you want to be able to carry that into the day as you get up from your meditation. Don't let it go leaking out outside because, as I said, if you let it leak out, then the eyes get bigger and bigger from being worn away with the erosion. Your ears get bigger and everything inside gets empty. All you can think of is how much you want to stuff things in from outside.

So learn to develop this sense of inner nourishment, and learn how to protect it. In that way, your eyes and ears will be just the right size—enough to handle whatever's going on in the world without a lot of hunger. Because, of course, when you're hungry, you start acting like a vacuum cleaner, sucking everything in. And mainly, vacuum cleaners suck in dirt. If you stuffed your stomach full of the stuff that's in that vacuum cleaner bag, you'd get sick. And that's why the mind gets sick: from lack of restraint of the senses.

Remember that these two things go together: concentration and restraint of the senses. The concentration gives restraint of the senses a foundation, and the restraint of the senses gives protection for the concentration. When they work together, the mind will be healthy and strong. That's the kind of health and the kind of strength we're working for.