

## *Generating Good Energy*

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The mind can be a source of great energy if you train it well. You've probably noticed that some people seem to radiate energy—and not just physical energy, there can be a mental, spiritual quality to it, too. Other people are energy sinks: They walk into a room and they suck all the energy out of the air. And it all comes down to how you handle things going on in your mind—which means that if you train your mind well, you can be a source of good energy, too, both for yourself and for the people around you.

Ajaan Lee talks about this in one of his last Dhamma talks, "Crossing the Ocean of Life." There's the energy of your goodwill, which other people can pick up if you have any karmic connection with them. The people who've helped you in the past: You can help them through the energy of your mind when it's well-trained. He makes the point, though, that if you're going to be spreading thoughts of goodwill, it has to come from a sense of well-being inside. His comparison is of opening a faucet. If there's water coming out of the faucet, it's cool in one way. If there's just a lot of wind coming out of the faucet, it's cool in another way. You want to be the faucet with water.

You create that by how you relate to yourself properly inside. You relate to yourself with goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. And you can learn these qualities in learning to relate to the breath. We're here to become friends with the breath. You want to be an admirable friend to your breath, not one of those false friends described in the passage we chant every now and then. You want to look after the breath well.

The breath needs care. If you don't pay attention to it, it'll simply come in and go out, sometimes in good ways, sometimes in ways that are not so good. You want to learn how to be sensitive to when the breath is good and to when it's not. When it's not good, you want to figure out how you can make it better. When it is good, you want to learn how to protect it. That means learning which qualities in your mind help make the breath good and help protect it, and learning to protect those qualities as well. This is how the mind starts to generate good energy.

Goodwill for the breath means that you want it to be comfortable. Compassion for the breath is when you notice that it's not comfortable and you do your best to figure out ways to make it more comfortable. You start with the in-and-out breath, figuring out what rhythm of breathing feels good. If things aren't so good, is it because the breath is too short, too shallow? Too long, too deep? Too heavy? Too light? You work at improving it and trying to figure out what's the problem. Sometimes the problem's with the physical

elements in the body; sometimes it's with the mind. So you make a survey to figure out what the cause is.

As for when the breath is going well, you try not to be complacent. Do your best to keep it going well and to figure out ways to make it better. Because you find that as the mind settles down into different layers of concentration, the way you experience the breath is going to change.

When you get the mind into the first jhana, there's a sense of breath energy suffusing throughout the body. But you're standing outside of it a little bit, watching over, like the bathman and the bathman's apprentice in the Buddha's image. He's working with the soap dough, but he's still separate from it.

In the second jhana, though, you're *in* the breath. It surrounds you. There's a sense of upwelling energy inside, and you want to learn how to keep it coming up. As the image in the Canon says, "There's a lake with a spring welling up within it, and the skies provide abundant showers, time and again." And you try to figure out: What's the quality of the mind that keeps that spring welling up, that energy flowing up in the body? How do you protect it? How do you keep it in balance so you don't just run right over it or tip it over?

With the third jhana, there's a sense of greater stillness in the breath, and that upwelling energy finally dissipates. Ajaan Lee's image is a nice one: He says it's like an ice cube. And there's a little bit of vapor coming off the surface of the ice cube, while things inside it seem to be pretty still. The breath energies in the body get more and more connected, so that if there's a lack of breath energy in one part of the body, you can connect it up immediately to a part where there may be an excess, so that things balance out, balance out, balance out all around the body, all through the body.

That leads to the point where the breath finally stops with the fourth jhana. Now, there are different ways the breath can stop. Sometimes you're suppressing it—which you don't want to do. Just give a little order to the body that "If you need to breathe, go ahead and breathe. But if you don't need to breathe, just sit right here and be very still. It's okay." It's important that, as you reach the stage, your awareness fills the entire body, you take as your object the body as a range of still energy and you learn how to protect it.

This is empathetic joy. You have empathetic joy both for the causes that you're creating by the way you focus and for the results.

And then there's equanimity for the breath. This can mean two things. One is when you've tried your hardest to help certain parts of the body to get connected to good breath energy, to take part in the general sense of well-being in the body, but you can't do it: Some parts of the body resist. And the more you try to work them into the general well-being of the body, the more they resist. There's usually a psychological reason to go along with the physical reason, which means this is going to take time.

So as with any skittish animal, you don't focus too much direct attention on those parts. You're aware of the animal, you look at it out of the corner of your eye, but otherwise you just leave it alone, in hopes that at some point it'll start trusting you. Then it'll begin to open up. There are certain parts of your mind that are closed off to you for one reason or another. And so it takes some patience and some equanimity to allow them just to *be* for a while as you work on other parts of the body. When there's a sense of trust inside, it'll begin to open up. That's one kind of equanimity.

Another kind of equanimity comes when the breath is totally still, the mind is still with the breath, and you don't need to push or pull anything in any way at all. You just let things be. Then you look after them, you tend to them, so that they stay in that balanced state. But you're not excited about it, you're not worked up about it, it's just there. It comes to be your new normalcy.

So by the way you relate to the breath you learn some important lessons about how to relate to other parts of your mind—and how to relate to other people, too. You create this good energy starting with the breath and then it radiates out from there. Goodwill for yourself, goodwill for others: in other words, a wish for true happiness. Compassion for when you see people who are suffering or who are doing things that are going to lead to suffering down the line—in other words, they're creating bad karma. You've got to have compassion for them, to do what you can to alleviate their current suffering, and if you can find some skillful way to get them to stop doing unskillful things, you try it.

Mudita, empathetic joy, is the brahmavihara that tends to get the least attention. We tend to feel that if people are happy already, they don't need us. But that's not the case. Because, one, empathetic joy means being happy not only for people who are happy, also for people who are doing good things. And those people need encouragement sometimes, so do what you can to encourage them. As for people who are happy already: It's important that you not develop jealousy or resentment. Because if those qualities show up in your mind, you're going to have that problem someday, too. When you're happy, other people will resent your happiness. Do you want that? No.

And you realize that we all have our good periods and our bad periods. As the Buddha said, when you see someone who's really suffering a lot, you have to remind yourself: You've been there. When you see someone who's extremely wealthy and endowed with all kinds of pleasures: You've been there, too. This way, you realize that we're all in this together. When you're being compassionate, you're not stooping down to help the people "below" you, and when you're happy for other people who are happy you're not dealing with people who are "above" you. We're all on the same level.

As for equanimity, there are times you've tried to help but it just doesn't work. This will have to do with either your past karma or other people's past karma. So you put the matter aside for the time being and focus on areas where you *can* be of help. And keep an eye out for the time when the conditions may change and you can be of help in another situation.

Now, these attitudes can be developed as you're actively interacting with other people, but you can also develop them here as you're meditating. Remember, you're generating these good qualities just by the way you relate to the breath. And you can dedicate this to others: either specific people you know are suffering right now, or all living beings in all directions. Because your mind is now generating good energy.

It's like being a radio station. You don't know who has the radio turned on. You don't know who has it tuned to your channel. But you just keep on broadcasting, creating good energy and thinking of it spreading out in all directions. That actually improves the quality of your concentration, at the same time that it improves the quality of the energy around you. Some people can pick it up immediately; other people will take a while; some people can't pick it up at all. But then again, you have no control over that. You're the radio station. You're not the monitor of all the radios in San Diego.

So try to generate good energy while you're here. Relate to the breath in a good way, relate to the events in your mind in a good way, and you automatically create a good energy field in all directions.