

Afraid of Inner Pleasure

January 27, 2016

The instructions are simple: Find the way you breathe, where you feel the breathing, and if the way you breathe is comfortable, keep breathing that way. If it's not, you can change.

At first, the sense of comfort may not be all that overwhelming, but allow it to be there all the way through the in-breath and all the way through the out-. You may notice that if you breathe in too long, you're putting a strain on that sense of comfort. If you shut it off too much, you don't get a sense of fullness. So try not to pinch the end of the breath, and don't breathe in any more than you have to.

But by the same token, as the Thais say, breathe with your whole abdomen. Let the breath go all the way down. And see how long you can maintain that sense of comfort. While you're protecting it, try to make sure that the boundaries are not too tight. In other words, allow it to start seeping out to the other parts of your body. And sometimes you'll be surprised at how strong the sense of well-being can become.

If you're too surprised, you get shocked and scared. So remember that there are outlets for the energy that can come with a sense of ease. In some cases, a tightness in the neck holds it in. Energy goes up into the head and doesn't seem to have any way to get out. If that's happening, try to adjust your posture so that the neck can be open, your throat can be open, and the energy can go down or up, whatever way feels best. It can drain out of the head through the neck and down the shoulders out the arms.

If there's too much pressure in the chest, again, let it go out the arms, out the palms of your hands. And if letting the energy come down the front of the body doesn't help, think of the energy going down the spine and then out into the Earth or the air from your tailbone. Ajaan Fuang used to have problems with headaches when he was young, and he found that just that—thinking of the energy going down the spine out the tailbone into the Earth—relieved a lot of the pressure.

What happens when there's pressure is that you're actually focusing more on the liquid part of the body than you are on the breath, moving the blood around and finding that it runs into blockages. It's like undoing a blockage in one part of a system of pipes, and then the water runs into another one. So try to think of everything being wide open. You breathe with all the pores of your skin open, in

and out. If there's too much energy coming in, well, just let it go back out again. See how long you can maintain this, even as you get up and leave the meditation.

Here again, you find sometimes you may be scared to feel a sense of well-being as you go into the world. You feel exposed. After all, your pores are all open. It's like going out into the cold after a really hot bath. You may feel exposed to other people. Well, remember that the breath energy has a kind of force field to it. Remember also that the biggest things to fear in life are not what other people do; it's what you do. With many of the unskillful things we do, it's because we have a sense of hunger, a sense of lack. Or if we get a little something that we feel possessive of, we tense up around it, and that shell of tension creates more trouble.

So try to think of the energy network in your body and around you in a different way. The breath energy is giving you not only a sense of ease, which helps you to relax, but also concentration, which is a kind of strength. The importance of that strength is that it helps prevent you from doing unskillful things because you've got a sense of well-being right here: the unskillful things we do either because we have something we're afraid that someone will take away, or we're feeling hungry for some kind of pleasure.

Now in the first place, we've got this well-being from the breath. Nobody can take it away. We're the ones who keep dropping it. It's like molding something nice with clay and, as you get up from the meditation, you just shatter it on the floor. Well, try to keep it well-molded as you get up and walk around. One of the images in the Canon is of a person walking with a bowl full of oil on his head, filled to the brim. You want to maintain a certain amount of poise as you go through the day. Don't jostle your concentration too much. Then you have the sense of well-being to draw on at any time.

And remember that nobody else can take it away. It's yours. How you sense the body from inside, no one else can sense. No one can force you to breathe in a way that's unskillful or in a way that adds to your stress. You're the one who's been breathing in a stressful way all along, and that's been adding a lot of stress on top of the other stresses of life. That's often what creates that sense of lack, the sense that something is wrong.

This is the other type of strength you can draw on. You've got a sense of well-being that you can feed on, so that when you're tempted to do something else simply for the sake of an instant pleasure, you're less likely to do it if you see that it's going to cause long-term suffering or harm down to the line, either to yourself or to other people.

And that sense of openness around you doesn't expose you to other people. In fact, oftentimes when you're tense around other people, they sense that, and they

begin to tense up as well. So a lot of the dangers you sense in the world out there are actually reflections of your fear. And remember again that the things other people can do to you are nothing compared with the things you can do to yourself through your unskillful actions.

Concentration is a strength that helps make it easier for you to resist the temptation to do the unskillful things that would cause harm to yourself and other people. So try to change your sense of the energy balance both inside and out. The things people do that you might find irritating don't need to grate on you so much if you've got this sense of inner pleasure going.

In the beginning stages, when you try to get concentrated and it seems fragile and easy to drop, it's very easy to get irritated by other people. But remember that their noises and whatever are not the problem. Their attitudes are not the problem. The problem is that you allow yourself to get distracted by them. In Ajaan Chah's phrase, it's not that noises come to disturb you; you're going out to disturb the noise. So think of the noise going right through you and doing nothing.

It's like what they say about dark energy. It doesn't have any impact on our normal sense of matter or energy; it just goes right through. Think of noises and other things from outside as just like that. It just goes right through you. It doesn't have to hit you. Often the problem is that you're putting up a resistance. Again, the problem is that you're tensing up around things, creating a shell. Something comes to break the shell, and you get upset. Well, if you can go around without a shell, there's no shell to break. A lot of those things you thought would penetrate and destroy things inside really don't destroy anything at all.

This is *the* basic message of the four noble truths, that the suffering we experience in the world, the suffering that really weighs down the mind, comes from inside. People can be cruel outside; people can do horrible things outside. And they do. But it's how you respond, how you process that: That's what makes you suffer. This is why we hear cases like Moggallana being beaten up by thieves. Those were horrible things they did to his body, but his mind wasn't affected.

That's the skill we're working on here. We'll find that, as we work on this skill, we'll be stumbling and picking ourselves up, stumbling and picking ourselves up again and again. But you keep in mind the fact that, okay, what we're working on here is an inner issue, so the outer issues don't really matter. That helps keep us and our practice in line.

So remember, this sense of ease is something that you shouldn't be afraid of. There are ways of dealing with it when it gets too intense. At the same time, you shouldn't be afraid to carry it out of the meditation into the world. It takes a

while, getting used to it. It's like having your spine realigned. You walk out, and it feels very strange. There's a tendency to want to go back to having your spine out of alignment again because you're more familiar with that. You've got to fight that tendency because eventually you'll find that walking around with an aligned spine is a lot better. It's better for your health, better for the body as a whole.

We're getting our minds aligned, both in terms of the concentration and in terms of our views about where suffering is and where danger lies. We live in a world with lots of dangers. But we have to learn how to be with them and not let our fear create even more dangers. We also have to recognize where the genuine dangers are. They're in our actions, our ability to do and say and think unskillful things—things that are certainly not in our long-term best interests that we go for in the short term.

That's the real danger. So having both this energy from the concentration—that sense of well-being from the concentration—and right view about what we have to be wary and heedful of: That can help us go more easily through the world.