

## *W.W.B.R.*

*February 1, 2016*

There are times when you sit down to focus on the breath and the mind is right there, and it takes to the breath. Ajaan Fuang would say that the mind takes to the breath in the same way a kite takes to the wind. You spread your awareness through the body and it stays there. You get interested in how the breath energy is moving, how you can fix problems with the breath energy here and there. You get absorbed in the whole process of being with the body, immersed in the body, immersed in the breath.

There are other times, though, when it's like putting a beach ball down into the water. You put it down in, and it pops right out. The mind wants to—or seems to want to—think about anything but the breath.

And here it's useful to remember how the Buddha taught his son breath meditation. Rahula asked him one time, "How do you practice mindfulness of breathing?" And the Buddha didn't start right in with the sixteen steps of breath meditation. Instead, he taught Rahula a lot of other meditation topics first.

The first was the one where he said to make your mind like earth. Whatever gets thrown on the earth, the earth doesn't respond, doesn't react, doesn't get disgusted. Make your mind like water. People use water to wash away disgusting things, but the water itself isn't disgusted. Make it like fire. Fire burns disgusting things. Make it like wind. Wind blows disgusting things around, but neither of them gets upset by the fact that these things are disgusting.

Basically, what he's saying here is to develop some patience, develop some equanimity. The mind is thinking? Okay, it's thinking. This is where you are. This is acceptance without resignation. In other words, you accept this situation as it is, but you don't resign yourself to it. Because the Buddha doesn't stop with just being equanimous. He gives you alternative ways of thinking about the topics that have you distracted. In other words, if the mind is not willing to settle down with the breath, have it think. It's got the energy to think, and thinking usually comes from irritation of some kind or another. This is why he starts with that image of not letting yourself get irritated by things. Otherwise, you're first irritated with things outside, then you start getting irritated with yourself for not being able to settle down, and things just go into a downward spiral.

Instead, develop some patience, realizing that this is going to take some time. But you don't just sit there with whatever's coming up. The Buddha gives you alternative ways of thinking about it. As in the sutta we chanted just now: thinking about things in terms of being not-self. These thoughts are not yours. You don't have to take them on. All too often, a thought gets proposed to the committee in the mind, and just the fact that it's been proposed makes you think that everybody's got to go along. Well, no. Somebody may be proposing the idea, but you don't have to go along with it. You can see it as something separate, which is what the teaching on not-self is all about.

As the Buddha said, to really get beyond your attachments to things, you have to see them as separate. There's your awareness, but the thought is something else. Okay, think about how things are inconstant. The thoughts come, and they're going to go. Good things will come and they'll go. So when the good things come, you take advantage of them. When the bad things are here, you just wait until they go. Or if you want to move them along a little faster, the Buddha recommends thinking about the topics of goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity, or contemplating the body in terms of the 32 parts—whichever topic is appropriate for the problem you've got right now.

Whichever type of issue that you're concerned with, there's a way of thinking that can counteract it. So if you don't want to stay with the breath—or if you want to stay with the breath, but some parts of your mind don't want to stay with the breath—then start thinking about the issues the Buddha recommends. You've got the energy to think, so think, but think the way the Buddha would think, or how he would recommend that *you* think. Ask yourself, what would the Buddha recommend? W.W.B.R. You're thinking about yesterday. Well, what would he recommend about your thoughts about yesterday? You're thinking about tomorrow. You're thinking about something somebody did, it might be a long time ago: What would the Buddha recommend? What would be the antidote to that kind of thinking?

Well, use that kind of thinking to counteract the way the mind is churning away with the topic, until you're ready to settle down—when you've decided you've had enough of that topic. The mind may think up another topic. Well, think of the antidote for that. What would the Buddha recommend for that? In this way, you develop equanimity but you don't just stay there. There's the acceptance that, okay, this is what the mind is doing right now, and the part of you that wants to get as much out of your time here at the monastery gets impatient. Okay, you've got to rein in that impatience a bit. This is where you are. This is where you start, and where do you go from here?

You see this same teaching in the forest ajaans. When Ajaan Lee is talking about the different ways of meditating in his book, *Frames of Reference*, he starts out with different ways of thinking. Think about the 32 parts of the body, think about the body in terms of the elements, think about how inconstant things are, to develop a sense of *samvega*. It's the *samvega* that helps pull you away from your outside concerns. Think about how you might be on your deathbed someday, looking back—and what were you thinking about when you were on your meditation retreat here? You were thinking about a grocery list. Or you were thinking about a revenge list. You'd say, "What a waste of time."

So try to develop that attitude toward these things. They may seem real and very important in the mind right now. You're getting into a state of becoming, and when you're in that state of becoming, the world looks very different from what it does when you're out of that state of becoming. It's like waking up from a dream. You realize, "That was just a dream." While you're in it, you're all concerned. You're in an airport and you can't get to the gate. You look for your luggage, and your luggage isn't there—but then you realize, "Hey wait a minute, this is a dream!" and then the luggage doesn't matter any more because it's luggage in a dream. It's not the real thing.

Learn to look at your thoughts in just the same way and try whatever antidote the Buddha

recommends, whether it's the *brahmaviharas* or the contemplation of the body, contemplation of death, contemplation of not-self, inconstancy. All of these contemplations we tend to equate with the wisdom part of the practice, which we think should come after the concentration, but that's not necessarily the case. Sometimes it requires some wisdom to get the mind to settle down. This is why the Buddha said that to get the mind into jhana requires both tranquility and *vipassana*, or insight. Sometimes you need to understand your mind to get it to settle down. You need to learn how to parry with the mind. In other words, it's thrusting in one way; you parry its thrust.

It's like learning a martial art, where you use the opponent's strengths against him. Your mind is thinking and thinking and thinking, so, okay, use that thinking against the kind of thinking that's pulling you away from the meditation. Turn it around. Ajaan Maha Boowa calls this discernment fostering concentration. He wrote a whole book on the topic. As he says in the book, sometimes things don't go right in line with the way they're listed in the texts: that first there's virtue and then there's concentration and then there's discernment. He says your defilements don't stand in a neat line. It's not the case that you deal first with sensual desire, and then with ill-will, and then with torpor and lethargy, and then with restlessness, and then with uncertainty. They can come in any order at all, so you have to be prepared to practice in any order.

Whatever's coming up in the mind, you deal with that first. If the mind is feeling obstreperous and entangled with things, Ajaan Maha Boowa's image is of a tree in the middle of a forest, which is unlike a tree out in a meadow. If a tree's in a meadow and you want to cut it down, you don't have to think too much about which direction you're going to fell the tree. You can cut it from any direction at all. But if it's in the forest, you find that its branches are entangled with the branches of the other trees, so first you've got to cut the branches. Then you have to figure out which direction the tree is going to fall, to get it to fall between the other trees and not on top of them. And then you can cut it down and get some use from it.

In this case, the branches stand for all your thoughts running out in all directions, so you use your discernment to cut, cut, cut through them. And which one do you cut first? As Luang Puu Dune explained to the King of Thailand one time when the king asked him, "Which defilement should be cut first?" Luang Puu Dune replied, "Whichever one arises first." In other words, whatever's coming up in your mind right now, that's the one you've got to deal with, whether it's a defilement that you feel primed to deal with—saying, "Gee, this is one that I really want to work on"—or not. This is where that practice of making the mind like earth comes in. This is the thought you've got to deal with right now, so this is what you deal with. And you learn not to make too big a deal out of it.

After a while you get used to it. When a defilement comes up—say, anger comes up—you get yourself to cut right through it. Greed follows. You cut right through that. Lust follows. You cut right through that. More greed. Ah, cut through that one again. And it becomes your sport. When nothing is coming up, you can settle down and be with the breath. Give the mind the rest it deserves. And often, we feel that "There are these other things I have to take care of first. I have all of these other responsibilities; it's kind of selfish to just be here with the breath."

It's not selfish at all. It's what the mind needs. It needs a place of rest in order to see things clearly, to act clearly, and to make clear decisions. When your mind is functioning well, everybody around you benefits. So remind yourself: This is something that's good for everybody, so there's no question of your not deserving the stillness, or not deserving the ease or bliss or whatever that can come when the mind settles down. This is for the good of all.

So when you look at your state of mind, and see *anything* that's getting in the way of your concentration, ask yourself, "What would the Buddha recommend? W.W.B.R? You find that over time, you get a more and more instinctive sense of what he would actually say. And you become more and more inclined to actually follow his advice.