

A Mind Like Earth

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Make your mind like earth. That was the Buddha's first meditation instruction to his son. Earth doesn't react. You throw disgusting things on the earth and it doesn't get disgusted. The image of the earth is used both in teachings on patience and in teachings on goodwill. The two have to go together. You try to make your mind large so that it can stand things and maintain its goodwill at the same time. The little tiny mind that says, "I can't take it, I can't take it," that's a perception that's getting in your way. What is it as you're sitting here that you're asked to take? Well, the results of the meditation may not come as quickly as you want. You may have to figure things out. The Buddha doesn't have you sit there like a clump of dirt. But he wants you to develop the quality of mind that is patient and can watch things carefully to figure them out.

Because after all, the mind does have a problem. It's creating suffering. It doesn't want suffering, and it doesn't want to create suffering, but it does. You've got to figure that out. It requires watching it and watching parts of the mind you don't like and not getting shaken by them. This is why you have to make the mind like earth, so that it can be ready to see whatever's going to come up and not get shaken around by it. That way you can admit it, you can see it clearly, and then figure out what can be done.

Sometimes the results of the meditation come quickly. You focus on the breath, and there it is, it feels good. You think about it spreading around the body and it does. Other times it doesn't happen so quickly. Sometimes it can take years for you to figure things out about the breath in the body. But the important thing is that you not think about how much time it's going to take or it has taken. That just adds an unnecessary burden on the mind, another unnecessary perception that makes things difficult.

Just tell yourself, "I'm here to learn." And don't compare your problems with other people's problems, because you're not here to solve their problems. You're here to solve yours. Those are the primary ones you're responsible for. Accept the fact that you've done things in the past that are leading to unpleasant things right now—pains in the body, difficult situations in life—and try to find the resources right now so you can be with those things unshaken and try to figure them out.

The Buddha's not having you just sit there. As Ajaan Chah once said, if patience were the only thing that were required, chickens would have beat us to nibbana a long time ago. They just sit, sit, sit on their nests. We're here to develop

patience so that we can see things clearly.

It's like doing a scientific experiment. If you have very precise equipment but you put it on a wobbly table, the equipment's going to give all kinds of weird readings, totally useless. You want it to be on a table that's solid, and the table in a building that's solid, and the building on the earth that's solid. That way, whatever the equipment measures, it'll measure well. So as you're facing problems in the meditation, try to develop this attitude of being as large and as patient as the earth.

The image of the earth being large also goes together with the teachings on goodwill. This is your way of showing goodwill for yourself. All too often our goodwill is impatient: "May all beings be happy and may they do it right now. May I be happy right now." You look at the world around you, you look at yourself, and it's not happening, and you wonder if it ever will. But you're developing goodwill to get the right attitude in your own mind: that whatever you're going to do, regardless of the situation, whether you like it or not, you're going to try to do the skillful thing. You can't let your impatience take over. There are some cases, not only with other people but also with yourself, that are going to take a lot of time.

So, think of your patience as being like earth. Think of your goodwill as being like earth. Because the goodwill is the motivation for the patience. We're here because we want true happiness. That's our goodwill for ourselves. We realize that true happiness can't depend on the suffering of others, so we have to have goodwill for them, too. That's why we're sitting here, putting up with whatever pains come in the body and whatever difficult emotions bubble up in the mind. Think about the earth. Think of your mind as being like the earth, watching those things come, watching those things go, and not being shaken by them. This requires that if there's a pain in some part of the body, just not responding. There are other parts of the body you can focus on. Tell yourself, "I can't have the whole body, but I'll take this."

Ajaan Lee's images of a house where some of the floorboards are rotten. You can't lie down everywhere on the floor, so accept the fact that you have to stay away from some parts of the house. You learn to make yourself comfortable elsewhere. The same with the mind: There's a part of the mind that's simply aware and it's unshaken by things. It's been covered over by our habits of getting upset by this, and worried about that, irritated by the other thing. We have to find the part of the mind that just observes, so we can take that as our foundation, and from there observe carefully. Ask questions. As long as the mind is asking questions, it's a moving target. Whatever the moods that come up in the mind, it's

difficult for them to shoot you, because you're probing now from this side, now from that side, learning to approach difficult emotions in the mind from different directions.

Don't simply accept their terms, because after all they have their ways of perceiving things and their ways of talking to you. It's like all conversations in the world: You start talking to somebody on a regular basis and after a while you start seeing things in their way, using their terms, and they suck you into their worldview. Here you have to question the terms of the emotion: What it's telling you. How is it framing the issue? Is that helpful? Is that really true? What if the opposite is true? To what extent would the opposite be true? What would that mean?

This way you can stand apart, because that's the trick to patience: learning how to stand apart from the things that are difficult. You're not ignoring them, you're not denying them, but you're not letting yourself get sucked into them. You have your tools; you have your way of dealing with these things. The teaching that says, "Well, just be with whatever comes up," if it doesn't give you the tools for doing that without getting sucked into whatever, it's actually exposing you to a lot of hardship. Ideally you're there but stepping back so that you're slightly separate. Don't identify with the difficulty. You realize it's there but you put yourself in a position where you can watch it, unfazed. And ask the questions that allow you to understand it in ways you didn't understand it before.

The reason we're suffering is because of a lack of understanding. We don't understand how we get sucked into creating suffering—because it *is* something we do. We choose to cling, even if we're not clear about how or why. So try to develop this area of the body, it may be small it may be a little larger, where you feel at ease, feel unshaken, and try to find that part of the mind that's like earth – solid, large, unshakeable. Establish yourself there. That way, even though the problem is not yet solved, you're not totally sucked up in the suffering around it, and you're putting yourself in a better position so that the insight that would allow you to solve that problem will eventually come.