

## *Free Sources of Energy*

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An important part of the practice is learning to appreciate the potentials you have right here in the present moment. There are times when you come to meditation—you're tired, it's been a long day—and you wonder if you can make it through. And then you suddenly discover something that helps give you strength. It's like a gift of the present moment.

And what it is, is the fact that the present moment is not totally determined by what's happened in the past. When they talk about things coming from causes and conditions, some of the causes and conditions are in the past, but some arise right in the present moment. There is that element of a fresh start. What it comes down to is that you're always doing something in the present moment, and there's always the possibility of doing it skillfully, doing it in a way that gives you more energy. That way, what happened in the course of the day doesn't have to determine how well your meditation is going to go right now.

You've got those three forms of fabrication. There's the breath: Ask yourself, "What kind of breathing would be energizing right now?" And explore. Experiment. Then there's verbal fabrication: How are you talking to yourself? If all you can say to yourself is, "I'm tired, I'm tired, I'm tired," it's going to wear you down. You've got to ask yourself, "Where are the potentials for energy right now?"

Think of Ajaan Lee out in the forest when he had his heart attack. He was in a place that required three days of walking in, which meant it was going to require three days of walking out. No medicine. No doctor. He had his breath and he had his way of talking to himself. You read his autobiography and you see how he found ways of giving himself encouragement. That's also when he learned how to use the breath to pull his body back together. So there you are: bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication.

And of course, when you're focusing on the breath, you have to have certain perceptions in mind and you're developing certain feelings. That's mental fabrication. In this case, what kind of breathing would feel energizing? What kind of perception of your abilities right now would be helpful? Your freedom to search for potentials that may not be obvious is something you always want to keep in mind.

Athletes have that experience when they're running and then they catch their second wind. They find that they thought they were going to be run into the ground but suddenly they find some energy as things pick up and they gain momentum. So where is your second wind as a meditator? Don't rule out the possibility that it's there.

And this applies to the practice all throughout the day: the things we have to do, the chores we have to do. The fact that we're living in a community means that there are responsibilities we have in the community, and we have to have the right attitude toward them.

Otherwise, they wear us down. But if you see them as opportunities, as opportunities to develop something good in the mind, then that changes the equation. The things that used to wear you down suddenly can become energizing.

So allow yourself to think in terms of developing merit. You're developing the perfections. And although there may be the groups of people who criticize the attitude of building up merit and acquiring perfections as a kind of spiritual materialism, the Buddha was not one of those people. He encouraged you to think of the mass of merit that you acquire and accumulate. He made the comparison with the different strengths of the mind as forms of inner treasures that you can amass. So think of the conviction as a treasure, think of virtue as a treasure, something you can amass of value inside.

When you have to give up other things for the sake of the practice, don't see it as a sacrifice. See it as a trade. You're trading up. And holding that perception in mind, holding that way of thinking in mind, will give you energy.

So much of the way we suffer comes down to how we talk to ourselves—that element of verbal fabrication. How we talk to ourselves determines what we crave, what we cling. If you do it in ignorance, there's going to be suffering. If you bring some knowledge to it—in other words, you start thinking in terms of the four noble truths—you see that you're suffering not because of the chores outside or the fact that you're tired. You're suffering because of craving and clinging. That puts a different cast on things. And if you can apply those categories to your situation right now, you can talk to yourself in a new way: Where's your clinging carrying you down? What can you let go of that'll enable the mind to come back up again?

So bring some appropriate attention to these forms of fabrication, and regard each present moment as a gift. There's something new that's going to come, there's a new potential for energy in each present moment. In this way, what's been going through the day, the narratives you've been telling yourself in the course of the day, don't have to determine the meditation right now. You've got *this* breath; you've got *this* opportunity to talk to yourself in a new way. You can breathe in a new way; you can hold new perceptions in mind.

And as you change the dialogue inside, and change the pictures you hang on the wall—in other words, the perceptions that run things—you find that even though the breath may not be the best breath possible, at least you've got the right attitude. After all, the attitude is what you're going to be able to take with you, even as you leave the body. There comes a point where you have to abandon the breath, but you'll still have verbal fabrication and mental fabrication. And at that point it won't be just a question of being tired—*the body's dying*—and you still want to be able to talk to yourself in a way that doesn't get you defeated, doesn't pull you down. You want to hold in mind the images of the possibility of moving on.

Sometimes you hear that criticism, "Why use the breath as a point of meditation? When you die, you're going to have to leave the breath, abandon your topic of meditation, and you'll be left helpless." That's not the case. When the Buddha teaches breath meditation, it's for the

purpose of learning not only bodily fabrication but also verbal and mental fabrication—getting sensitive to them, learning how to calm them down. But before you calm them down, you use them to energize yourself.

That's why in his instructions for breath meditation he uses the technical term *fabrication*. It gets you sensitive to the fact that there's something being put together right now. That's what the present moment is: something fabricated. So even though the past may be delivering some raw material that you'd rather not have to deal with, you *do* have the choice right now of fabricating it in a more skillful way: thinking to yourself in a more skillful way, talking to yourself in a more skillful way, breathing in a more skillful way.

There's always the potential for something new in the present moment. So make it something skillful, something energizing, something that's not defeated by whatever comes in. After all, the Buddha calls this a path of ultimate victory. So use your ability to fabricate—bodily, verbally and mentally—to come out winning.