

Realities Right Here

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When I first went to stay with Ajaan Fuang, there was one morning when I was meditating. He'd been talking about the breath in the different parts of the body, and I found that I had a little pain in my spine. So I asked myself, "Well suppose that's breath. See if we can work with it." I focused on it and I was able to get it to unknot itself, I guess you might say. Then it got into my digestive system, and I belched. I was really surprised: It really was breath. I don't know what I'd been thinking up to that point: that this was some kind of make believe game? But I went down later that day and I mentioned it to Ajaan Fuang: "This breath stuff is really real." The way he looked at me was priceless. "Of course it's real," he said. "That's what we're dealing with when we meditate: We're dealing with realities."

For those of us coming from the West or from a modern education system even in the East, we don't think too much about the breath in the body. But that's because we tend to be desensitized to our bodies as we feel them from within. You've got breath, you've got warmth, you've got coolness, and you've got solidity. These are described as the four elements, or the four properties, or *dhātu*.

When we think of them as elements, it sounds like a primitive form of chemistry, but it's not. It's how you feel these things from within. Actually, we in the West are very impoverished in our vocabulary for describing this sort of thing. So it's good to get to know the Buddha's vocabulary. After all, name and form are the basis for experience in the world, and form is composed of these four things: how you experience breath, how you experience warmth, coolness, solidity in the body. If you experience them with ignorance, it's going to lead to suffering. If you begin to bring knowledge and awareness to them, it becomes part of the path. So try to look at your sense of the body in these terms. Look at you mind in these terms as well.

What have you got in the mind on this level? You've got acts of attention, intentions, feelings, perceptions, contact. Learn to see them on those terms, because that's what you directly experience in the mind. When you get into a feeling or a thought world, you don't see them in those terms. But when you can step back a little bit and can observe your mind, you begin to realize that's actually what's going on.

So try to be fully sensitive here, right here, right now. Put aside the notions you've learned from outside of what's going on, because most of what we learned

from science, say, observes the body and the mind from outside. Remind yourself: You're going to explore from within. And as the Buddha says, you're going to find first that there's the activity of fabrication in all of this. In other words, there are some intentions that tell you to breathe in now, breathe out now, think this, think that. So bring some attention to your intentions.

The best way to do that is to intend one thing and stick with that intention. You're going to stay with the breath on the level of how you experience it right now. Then you watch your intentions around that. Some intentions will come in, wanting you to do something else. The fact that you're sitting here meditating doesn't mean that everybody inside is on board. But for the committee members who are not on board, you're just going to have to let them go, let them go. Don't pay them any mind; don't show them any interest. You've got to hold on to your intention to stay with the breath and to stay with your awareness right here.

When you breathe in, ask yourself: Where do you actually feel the movement in the body? It may not be where you expected it. What's the best way to pay attention to the breath in the body? What are the best perceptions to have around the breath? You can think of the breath coming in almost anywhere in the body. But notice, where does it *feel* like it's coming in? Where does the movement of the breath start? It starts in the body—because we're talking about the breath element in the body, not the air that gets pulled in and out.

Sometimes the energy seems to come from outside; sometimes it comes from inside. Where does the movement originate? Sometimes it seems to start down around the naval; sometimes it seems to start around the heart, or in the head. Focus where it seems to start. Then let it spread smoothly from there. Remember, you're not just watching things here. There's that element of fabrication. The observer is one important part of the meditation, but it's not the only part.

Sometimes you hear about simply awareness itself, or intuitive awareness, as being the goal of the practice. Actually, it's part of the path, and it has to function with other parts of the path as well. After all, we've got right resolve, which is connected to your intentions. And right view, which is connected to the act of attention. So you've got those elements of the path right here. Just try to make sure they're elements of the right path, and not elements of the wrong path.

So you've got body and mind, name and form, as you're experiencing from within. Try to keep this perspective going. Get sensitive to the movements in the mind, the movements in the body, and see how you can calm them down. First, they sometimes need to be energized, with a sense of refreshment throughout the body, and *then* you calm things down. Think in ways that are calm; breathe in

ways that are calm. You begin to see how body and mind influence each other and can help each other along here.

But the important point is, you see things as events as they're happening, because eventually that's the perspective that's going to allow you to let go. But first, before you let go, use these concepts to hold on, settle in, because you want this to be your home base, you want this to be default mode. So get really familiar with it, really comfortable with it, gaining a sense of how you can bring the different elements into balance: how you can think, perceive, intend things, in ways that are calming; breathe in ways that are calming to body and mind; think in ways that are calming, refreshing, to body and mind.

You want the meditation not only to calm you down, but also to give you a sense of refreshment, because that does keep you going. You'll be amazed at how you can adjust these elements of name and elements of form. So get used to thinking in these ways. Get used to this vocabulary, this point of view. Because as you use it to get the mind to settle down, you're also getting familiar with the categories that the Buddha wants you to think of as you're trying to understand, trying to gain discernment.

The more you like thinking in these terms, the more naturally the discernment will come. You find that you're not just playing a game. You're dealing with realities, and you know they're realities because they work. They take you to something that's unquestionably real. And makes them real enough.