

Single-minded

October 3, 2021

Concentration is defined as singleness of mind, which gives rise to a question: The first jhāna has five factors. It's as if you have five pots on the stove that you have to take care of all at once. So how can you be single in your mind?

But look carefully at those five factors. Two of them are results of the other three. In other words, you do the directed thought and evaluation in one object, but you don't have to do the rapture or do the pleasure. The rapture and pleasure come as a result of what you're doing with the others. And as for the others, they're all centered on one thing. You direct your thoughts to the breath, you evaluate the breath, and you don't think about anything else. That's the oneness, or singleness of the mind.

Ajaan Lee's image is of a post. You hold on to the post and spin around the post. As long as you stay focused on the post and hold on tight, you don't get dizzy, you don't lose your balance. In the same way, when you're focused on the breath, you've simply got two activities centered on one object. And the activities are an essential part of getting the mind to even deeper states of oneness, more solid states of oneness. Sometimes you hear them described as a wavering or wobbling of the mind because it hasn't settled in solidly yet. But if it is a wavering and a wobbling, it's wavering and wobbling with a purpose: putting the mind and body together snugly. It's the work you do to put things together and make them right. To use another analogy, it's like making a chair or a chest of drawers. You sand the pieces of wood properly. You cut them properly so that they're snug. If they're not quite snug, you sand them again until they're just right. And then you don't have to sand them anymore because they fit together snugly.

So in this case, with the thoughts directed to the breath, you keep reminding yourself to stay with the breath. The evaluation is to make sure that the breath is a good place to stay. It's just right for the body, just right for the mind. If it's not comfortable, you figure out what could be done to make it more comfortable. That's part of the evaluation. Then when it *is* comfortable, the evaluation goes further. How do you maintain it? Once you can maintain it, how do you let it

spread? After all, the Buddha says that you want the sense of pleasure and rapture to spread throughout the whole body. And how do you do that?

Think of the breath energy going down the spine, out the legs, down the nerves of the shoulders and the arms, through all the muscles of the body. Do you have a sense of the breath filling the body? A sense of ease filling the body? Your awareness filling the body? When they all cover the same territory like that, that's when you really get a sense of oneness. That large sense of oneness intensifies the pleasure, intensifies the rapture, and allows you to go deeper into concentration. You can put the directed thought and evaluation aside.

To go back to the image of the pot on the stove, it is just one pot. You're hovering around it, tasting what's in the pot. If it's not quite right, you figure out: Does it need more salt? Less salt? What needs to be added? Does the fire need to be turned up, turned down? You adjust things in this way until everything's just right. Then you can eat whatever you have in the pot. You don't have to worry about adding extra salt. You don't have to think in those terms anymore. You just enjoy what you've got. That's getting the mind into the second jhana, where there's a sense of being one with the breath. The awareness and the breath and the body all seem to be one. Try to maintain that.

Sometimes the question will come up: What's next? What's next is maintaining. You're working on a skill here. You're not checking off the jhana boxes and moving on. You want to learn what you can see as you get the mind *really, really* still. And among the first things you'll see are thoughts of impatience. You have to recognize those for what they are: They're defilements at the moment. This is a stage where you want to learn to trust the sense of oneness, to be content with the oneness. So pick off the other little thoughts that would pull you away.

This way you're developing a sense of ease, a comfortable dwelling in the present. You're developing your mindfulness and alertness to maintain this. And you're beginning to see the little defilements that would eat away at your concentration. You're not yet at the point where you can do away with them, but you do get a sense of having a comfortable place where you can step back and step out of them. That's a necessary part of the practice: having this place where you can step out. You've got something better than thinking about greed, aversion, or

delusion. You look at the pleasures that they have to offer, and you realize you've got something more solid and reliable here. So content yourself with the oneness. Get so that you're really good at this. You know your spot, you know the comfortable breath, and you learn how to deal with whatever defilements are going to come along and try to destroy this.

As it gets easier, then comes the next part, where you're *not* content with what you got. Ask yourself, is there something deeper than this? After all, there are the many levels of jhāna. Whether your concentration fits into jhana yet or not, that's not the issue. The issue is, can you see when you've settled in and feel secure and feel solidly here? Is there anything in the concentration itself that is still a disturbance? After all, the directed thought and evaluation are necessary at the beginning, but after a while they do become a disturbance. A sense of rapture and refreshment, the energy of the breath courses through the bodies at times. Sometimes that's refreshing to begin with—it feels really good, really satisfying—but then after a while it, too, becomes a disturbance. You want to see what you can do to tune in to a level of stillness that's even more still, where everything is really one, really still to the point where even breathing seems to be a chore. You'd be perfectly happy just to sit filled with breath energy but with no felt need to breathe in or breathe out.

Now, sometimes you get there simply by settling in without thinking too much about it, but other times you do have to actively question. This is where the phase of discontent comes in. Some people say, "I've read that you can gain awakening simply from the first jhana, so that's going to be plenty enough for me." You can't ordain ahead of time which level of jhana is going to be enough for you. You can't say, "The higher levels are going to be superfluous, so why bother with them? I'll just hang out here." It requires a lot of discernment in order to get an awakening from the first jhana.

Sometimes you need a lot more quiet in the mind in order to gain the kind of insight that would be radical. In some of Ajaan Lee's images, you work on getting still, being content with the stillness, and then you develop some discontent. It's like walking: You lean to the right, you lean to the left, then you lean to the right again, then the left again as you settle in. The question is: What have you got as you settle in? You then settle in further. And in that rhythm you're going to see a

lot. Because everything you need for awakening is right here. You've got bodily fabrication: the breath; verbal fabrication: directed thought and evaluation, the way you talk to yourself; and the mental fabrication: feelings and perceptions. They're all right here. There's no other place you have to look. Simply look really carefully right here, and learn when to look carefully and when to really settle in and aim simply at stillness. Get a sense of the rhythms of the mind.