

New Eyes

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People who go into the forest to gather mushrooms say that there's such a thing as having the right eyes to see the mushrooms. A person without the right eyes can look at a patch of the floor in the forest and although the mushrooms are right there in plain sight, that person won't see them. The reason for this is that the person doesn't have the image in his mind of what to look for, how to recognize the mushroom, and how to see the mushroom where someone else might see just a shade of the leaves on the floor. The person with the right eyes does see the mushrooms. They're looking at the same little patches of black that the person without the right eyes sees as shade, but this person sees mushrooms. They talk about how as you gain the right eyes, there's a sudden shift in your mind. You're looking at the same spot and all of a sudden your mind shifts, and you see the mushrooms. They stand right out.

That's one of the things you've got to develop as a meditator. After all, you're looking at your breath. What was the Buddha looking at the night of his awakening? He was looking at his breath as well. Same breath, but he saw something different. The way he looked was different and so he saw things that most people didn't see, that nobody else had seen before him, at least not in this dispensation.

This is why right view is such an important part of the practice. If you have right view, you see a lot of interesting things going on in the breath right now. Lots of people will say they look at the breath, it goes in and goes out, and after a while they get bored and start looking for something else. The mind goes looking for something else to think about. It's not that they get distracted by other things. They distract themselves because they're not looking carefully enough, and they don't recognize the big issues that are happening right here in the present moment.

Each time you breathe in, breathe out, the processes of birth, aging, illness, and death are happening right there. There's a potential for bliss right there. There's a potential for rapture right there. All kinds of things are right there in the breath. But you slough right over them, maybe because you're looking for entertainment, or for quick results in line with your preconceived notions about what those results are going to be.

This is why the Buddha said that one of the most important aspects of the practice is something called appropriate attention. Appropriate attention involves

asking the right questions, learning to look with the right eyes. When you look with the right eyes, you see that fascinating things are happening right here, right now. The mind is engaged in the process of creating suffering and stress—and if that weren't an interesting process, what *is* interesting in life? We all want happiness, we all want ease, we talk about bliss and rapture, and everybody wants to go there. And yet we keep creating stress and suffering for ourselves—one of the big ironies of life. And it's happening right here in the mind in the present moment. If you want to see it, the first place to look is right around the breath, how you relate to the breath.

So each time you breathe in, breathe out, remind yourself that something interesting is going on right here, but you're not catching it. You're missing it. So each time you breathe in, breathe out, ask yourself: "How else could I look at the breath? How else could I breathe? How else could I relate to the breath in a way that would open up this issue of why I'm creating stress and suffering even though I want to be happy?"

To begin with, you can ask yourself: Where's the stress right now?—either the physical stress of breathing, or the mental stress of not wanting to stay with the breath. Thoughts of boredom come in. You might ask yourself: What happens when a thought of boredom comes in? For most of us, as soon as the thought comes in, "I'm bored." But how did that happen? How did the "I" get in there? And who's demanding to be entertained? There are so many other things in life that we are patient with, so why can't we be patient with this? You can work hard for a whole month knowing that you're not to get your wages until the end of the month, and yet you can do that. You can invest money in a stock, or you could in the past. It used to be you'd invest money in a stock and, after a couple months, you'd get enough to be worth the investment. And even in the greedy 80's and 90's, people were willing to be a little patient about that.

Yet here you are, sitting with your breath just for an hour. Why do you have to have results right away? After all, the work you're doing here is good work. You're not cheating anybody. You're not oppressing anybody. Nobody's forcing you to do this work. You're here of your own free will. All the responsibilities of the day can be put aside. You've got the opportunity to explore. That in and of itself should give you a sense of well-being. If it doesn't, learn how to talk yourself into a state of cheerfulness. When things aren't going well in the meditation, it doesn't help to whip yourself or beat yourself over what a bad meditator you are. That just discourages you and makes it more difficult to meditate.

I was reading a book a while back about the exploration of the Arctic. And sometime during the early 19th century, there was an Englishman who wanted to

check out a source of copper in the Northwest Territories. He was probably the first European to totally entrust himself a band of Indians. They said they were going to go there and they'd be willing to take him along. So he went along, the only European in the group. Some days they'd get food to eat; some days they wouldn't. Sometimes it would go on for a couple days when they didn't have food to eat. And he noticed that on the days when they had no food, they refused to talk about discouraging things. They would laugh and joke, whatever they could do to keep their spirits up. That's how they got the energy to keep going.

So as a meditator you've got to learn how to remind yourself that what you're doing here is a good thing. All you're asked to do is to breathe, which you're going to do anyhow. And then watch the breath, because right here you're going to learn about your own mind. Isn't that the most worthwhile thing to learn about? To watch the movements of your mind, to see how, given a particular situation, you can either create a lot of suffering out of it or you can create a lot of joy—the same situation, but you handle it differently: That should be a really fascinating process.

If nothing else, you learn about the body. I know, in my own case, as I came to breath meditation, especially encountering the Ajaan Lee method, I realized that here, at last, was a chance to get back in touch with my body. As a teenager, I was pretty much in my head all the time. I was clumsy and ran into things because I was totally in my head. The body was strange territory. But with the Ajaan Lee method, you work with the breath energy in the body. You've got a means for getting back in touch with your body, fully inhabiting it, sensing the energy flow, to see how the energy flow can have an effect on the mind, how the mind has an effect on the energy.

There's a lot to explore here. It's just a matter of adjusting your eyes a little bit. Try to look in a new way, developing the right attitude, because everything you need to know is right here. The Buddha said that the world, the origination of the world, the end of the world, and the path to the end of the world are all right here in this fathom-long body with its consciousness and awareness. It's simply a matter of learning how to look, how to learn how to keep looking over time. The results may not come as quickly as you want, but if there's impatience you have to learn how to look at the impatience and not identify with it. Just realize that this is one more instance of stress, combined with the cause of stress. Instead of riding along with it, you turn around and look at it. Try to comprehend it so that you don't remain enchanted with it.

And you learn how to develop the inner strengths that can counteract it. Patience is not developed by just gritting your teeth and bearing with things. It also requires looking on the bright side of whatever the situation is. It's typical in

Thailand to say that even if you don't get awakening right now, at least you're developing the habits that'll help you in the future. In other words, you're walking in the right direction. Keep that in mind. As you're sitting here, you're harming no one. Keep that in mind. You've the opportunity to watch your thoughts simply as events, rather than having to use them to serve other people's purposes and gain a living. Keep that in mind.

So even though the results aren't coming right away, a lot of other good things are happening. Or let me rephrase that: Even though the results that you're looking for—awakening, total end of suffering—are not happening right now, you *are* on the path. You're looking at the right spot. You're doing something meritorious. It's good not only for you, but also for the people around you. This skill we're working on has both its private and its public side. Learn to think with gratitude of all the people who've helped create the situation where we're sitting here right now. You're doing this not only for yourself, but also for them.

I'm reading a book on craftsmanship. And the author starts out with a very interesting observation: that, at the very beginning, when people began to look back on how human society had developed in its very early stages—when you had to sleep in caves and put up with raw food, and didn't have any tools and didn't have a social organization—the organization of society came about through the development of skills. The word they had for a craftsman was someone who worked for the common good. In other words, the craftsman benefits not only him or herself, but also the rest of society through the mastery of the craft.

So as you develop this craft of meditation, gaining more control over your mind, remind yourself you're helping human society. This crazy country we're in could use a lot more meditators. And so here you are, one more meditator doing your bit.

So even though the results you're hoping for may not be fully appearing right now, a lot of good things *are* happening right now, things that you're doing right now. Develop the eyes to see those things. And stick with the practice.