

## *Training the Mind to Train the Mind*

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We've come here to train the mind. The problem is that the mind has to train itself, which means that when you're sitting down here, the mind is in at least two sections: the part that wants to do the training and the part that's going to be trained. The part that's going to be trained doesn't necessarily want it, and even the part that's doing the training is not necessarily all that wise. So we're training all the parts of the mind, which is why this takes time, because we're going to be sorting out a lot of things inside. This is why we don't focus directly on the mind to begin with. We focus on the breath. And even with the breath, sometimes it requires that we do a little thinking first about why we might want to stay with it.

One of the reasons is indicated in those chants at the beginning of the meditation: reflecting on aging, illness, death, and the fact of separation. We repeat these facts not to be pessimistic or dark and depressed, but to remind us that these are real problems in life. Such a large part of our culture points us away from paying attention to these things. They say, "Well, you can't do much about these things anyhow. So you might as well not even think about them." But these are the big facts in life, the big things that cause us to suffer. And the Buddha's message, of course, is that you *can* do something about them. Even though aging, illness, death, and separation are going to happen, you don't have to suffer from them. The suffering is the big problem, but it's optional.

And then the fifth contemplation: the contemplation of the fact that we're the owners of our actions. We're heirs to our actions. In other words, we choose what we do, and what we do is going to have an impact on us. This actually points the way out. This is our treasure. The actions we do in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, these are things we take with us. These are the things that keep meeting with us in life: the results of our actions. So what do you want to meet with? What do you want to take with you?

And where do actions come from? Well, they come from the mind. That's a good reason to meditate right there: to gain some control over your mind so that you can begin to trust it. Then, when an intention comes up, you'll be able to see it for what it is, skillful or unskillful. And if you see that it's unskillful, you have the desire and the strength and the skill to be able to say No effectively and not turn into some sort of psychological mess all tied up because you said No to the things you really want to do. You have to learn how to *want* not to do those things.

As for things that are skillful, they may be hard. You want to train yourself to have the strength and the willingness to follow through with them.

So those are some good reasons to meditate right there.

Then there's the reflection on the brahmaviharas, wishing all beings to be happy. Those who are suffering: May they end their suffering. Those who are already happy: May they continue in their happiness. You think about, of course, the fact that you are one of the beings you want to see happy. At the same time, if your happiness depends on making other people miserable, they're not going to stand for it. They're going to try to destroy whatever your happiness depends on. So, if you want a happiness that lasts, you have to take the happiness of others into consideration. That's another good reason to meditate, because meditation is a way of finding happiness inside that doesn't harm anybody at all.

And then, finally, there's the reflection on equanimity, realizing there are some things we simply cannot change, some things in life over which we have no control at all: primarily, the actions of other people. They have the right to choose whatever they want to do. Some other things you can't control are your past actions. They're already done. The results of your own past unskillful actions that are going to come up and they'll cause some pain. The results of your past skillful actions come up and they'll cause pleasure—but then the pleasure's going to go. Or if you hold onto the pleasure, your holding-on turns into an unskillful mind state. So you've got to be very careful.

This is where equanimity comes in. "I can't let myself be tied up in making my happiness depend on the ups and downs of other people's actions, or even of my own past actions." What do you have left? Your present actions right now. This is where you do have some control. You can decide where you're going to focus your mind. You can decide what you're going to do with it, which is another good reason to meditate: so that you can learn some skills that help you to know your mind really well. When you see that it's heading off in a wrong direction, you can move it in a right direction. When it's moving in the right direction, you can encourage it, keep it going.

So all these are good reasons to meditate, good reasons to develop some good qualities in the mind, which is what we're doing as we meditate.

The word for meditation in Pali, *bhavana*, literally means that: development. We're trying to develop concentration by keeping the mind with one object, the breath. We bring other qualities in and develop them as well. We bring mindfulness in—in other words, the ability to remember. Mindfulness, in the Buddha's use of the word, doesn't mean just watching things coming and going, or being open and accepting of things. It actually has direction. Its direction is to

remind you of what's skillful and what's not skillful, and of what lessons you've learned from the past in dealing with skillful and unskillful things that you can remember that helped you get past some unskillful thoughts that were threatening to take over your mind, but you learned how to say No. Effectively. You also remember times when you were able to give rise to skillful qualities when it seemed like those were the last thing that the mind wanted to do, but you were able to find the strength, find the resources within you to do what was right. And here, as we meditate, we develop that quality. We develop the ability to remember by keeping the mind with the breath and reminding ourselves again and again, "Stay with the breath. Stay with the breath." That's mindfulness.

Alertness is actually watching what you're doing: watching what the breath is like and watching what the mind is like right now, what it's doing, and the results of what it's doing.

And there's a third quality, which is ardency, the desire to put your heart into doing this well and getting good results. That's where those motivating factors come in to remind yourself of why you might want to sit here watching your breath when there are so many other things you could be doing right now. You realize that all those other things you could be doing are simply feeding off the results of your past actions, and they're not necessarily developing good qualities in the mind. Whereas here, you're developing good qualities. You're developing goodwill for yourself, goodwill for others.

So find ways to give yourself pep talks to stay right here. It also helps if you can learn how to really get to know the breath, so that you can figure out, "What kind of breathing feels good? What kind of breathing feels right for the body right now?" And what are the body's needs right now? Is it tired? Can you breathe in a way that gives it energy? Are you tense? Breathe in a way that relaxes. And which parts of the body feel good when you breathe in and breathe out? Let your attention settle there. Then think of that sense of comfortable feeling—refreshed, energized, just right—spreading throughout the whole body. This is why Ajaan Lee talks so much about the concept of breath energy: the idea that there's an energy flowing through the nerves, an energy flowing through the blood vessels, and it's related to the in-and-out breath.

Can you think of the breath nourishing the whole body so that it feels good to be here? So that you can win over the parts of the mind that are not necessarily sure they want to be here meditating right now? Show them that it feels really good, something simple, just like this: being with the breath. Here's a pleasure that has no drawbacks, that causes no harm to anyone. When you learn these skills, you can tap into the breath whenever you want. And having a sense of inner

well-being: That makes it even easier, when you're tempted to do something wrong, to be able to say No, because you've got something good already.

The reasons we make unskillful choices is usually because we're hungry for a little hit of pleasure. There's a certain pleasure in greed. There's a certain pleasure in anger. And it comes really easily. When you're feeling starved, when the mind is feeling starved for some entertainment, for some diversion, if it doesn't have anything good to focus on, it'll go for whatever. So you want to give it something better than whatever, something good to nourish it. As for any thoughts that may come up while you're working with the breath, thoughts that are not related to the breath, you can just let them go.

It's very common that all kinds of random things will come up. Especially as there's less and less surface activity in the mind, things will come bubbling up from within. This is another reason why we have that chant on goodwill at the very beginning. You start thinking about incidents from the past: things you did to other people or other people did to you. To get past those thoughts, you can remind yourself of the principle of kamma: We're the heirs of our actions. What that means is that if you try to trace back who was really at fault, you find that the fault keeps going back, back, and back.

When we develop notions of fairness, they usually come down to the fact that there was a beginning of the story, then someone was the first person to do something wrong, and then someone else responded and may have overreacted. And you can kind of tally up the score. But in the Buddha's view of time, there is no beginning point where you can say the story began here. The story goes back many lifetimes. So the idea of assigning blame or getting really upset about these things seems less and less worthwhile.

The best thing is to extend thoughts of goodwill to everybody involved. Make up your mind that if you were the one who made the mistake, you don't want to repeat that mistake. If you're the person who was wronged, okay, it doesn't help to get upset about that. When you feed off the sense of being wronged, it may give you some satisfaction, but it's pretty miserable satisfaction. You're feeding off old rotten food. So learn how to extend some forgiveness to everyone involved. Learn how to make that your default reaction, so that whenever something—anything—threatens to come up while you're focusing on the breath, threatening to entangle you and pull you away, you can cut through the tangles pretty quickly.

This doesn't settle those issues once and for all, but it does enable you to clear some space in the mind where you can develop some skill in concentration. As your concentration gets stronger, your discernment gets more refined. The more still you can make the concentration, the subtler the things you'll be able to see.

And if you're tempted to take on a particular issue, you can watch yourself to see what happens. If you realize that you're not handling it well, you can pull out. You'll have to save that issue for some other time. Because the big issue right now is how to get the mind to settle down with a sense of well-being and be happy to stay here.

As the Buddha said, all the things we experience, everything in fact outside from nibbana, comes from desire. Our unskillful mind states come from desire. Our skillful mind states come from desire. So a large part of the meditation is learning how to train your desires in the right direction. We're not trying to snuff out desire right away. Eventually, you get the mind to a point where the mind doesn't have any need for desire anymore. That's when you can put it aside. But until that point, you've got to learn how to train your desires in the right direction, because they make all the difference. Everything is rooted in what you desire.

So this is one of the reasons why we have these contemplations, to help you motivate yourself to want to want in the right direction, or to desire to desire in the right direction. This is why, when you read the Dhamma talks of the Thai ajaans, a huge percentage of them are basically pep talks so that the listeners will stay motivated to be ardent in developing their minds, with a strong sense that the actions coming from the mind really do matter, and that it's a good use of their time to learn how to learn how to train the mind so that this source of action will produce good actions that produce good results. Because we have this tendency: We all want happiness and yet we do things that cause suffering. And sometimes we do it because we don't believe our actions have any impact or we have some misunderstanding about what our actions will accomplish.

But when the mind is well trained, you realize that the source of happiness is in the mind. It comes through what we do and say and think, based on our intentions. And then we can train the mind. So these contemplations are there to keep the mind motivated in its training, so that the part of the mind that's doing the training and the part of the mind that's being trained will learn how to work together. The part that's doing the training gets more and more skillful as it becomes more and more observant. And the part being trained finds that it really is good to be trained. That's when the whole mind becomes something you can learn how to trust.