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Each time when you sit down to meditate, you want to survey your body, survey your mind. Get a sense of your situation. Are there any particular pains in the body right now that are going to require attention? How about the state of your mind? Any events in the course of the day that are sticking in your mind, in your memory, that are going to get in the way? Well, do your best to clear these out so you find it easier to settle down. Usually the most disruptive events from the day are things that have got you angry. So that’s why we have the chant for goodwill every night, every night, every night. Don’t just say the words. Allow yourself really to think, “May I be happy. May all living beings be happy, including the people that got you upset today.” If you find it difficult to start out with them, start out with someone who’s easier to feel thoughts of goodwill for. And then as a sense of fellow humanity grows, then you can start spreading those thoughts to other people that are more difficult. Then turn your attention to the breath. Turn your attention to the body. How does the body feel right now? Are there any particular parts that are going to require work? If so, you’ve got your first task right there before you. Give some focus to your meditation. Sometimes when you sit down, you sit down simply because it’s time to sit down. You don’t have any sense of what you’re doing or what you’re going to focus on. Generally, it’s staying with the breath. But if you notice you’ve got a pain in a particular part of the body or a sense where the energy flow in the body isn’t going right, you can keep that in mind. It’s the first place you’re going to turn once you have been able to establish a beachhead. In other words, a part of the body where you do feel comfortable. And that part itself may change from time to time. Sometimes it’s easy to stay focused on the chest. Other times you find it easier to stay at the throat, the stomach. So notice where the body already feels comfortable. Focus on that and maximize that sense of comfort. And then you can start spreading it to the parts of the body that are less comfortable to stay settled in. What this means is you’ve got to look at your situation. Give some direction to what you’re doing. Otherwise, the mind just sort of wallows in its concentration or wanders around aimlessly without any sense of what it’s doing or where it’s going. You meditate without any question. If you set up specific questions in your mind before you meditate, the most basic ones are just these. Any particular issue in your mind that you’ve got to deal with? Any particular issue you’ve got to deal with in the body? When you give yourself some sense of particularity like this, it’s a lot easier to stay focused and a lot easier to learn specific lessons from each person. Time to meditate. It’s like when you drive. The issue came up today. You’ve got to focus down the road. Get a sense of your general situation. Both the car is way up in front of you and the car is way in back of you. So know where you are and what the situation is. That gives you a particular sense. Okay, this will have to be done. Watch for this opening. Watch out for that opening. Make sure you don’t get caught behind that vehicle. Notice which vehicles are driving dangerously so you stay up and you avoid them. This way, as you give yourself specific questions, specific tasks in the driving, you become a much more skillful driver, a much safer driver. The same principle applies in your meditation. You’ve got to have specific tasks that you focus on. Otherwise, you don’t notice anything. But when you get particular, when you get specific, you notice specific things. You have a sense that here is a problem. What are we going to do to solve it? If you drive along, just kind of drifting along, there’s nothing particular in your driving and there’s nothing particularly safe about your driving either. The same with your meditation. Just kind of drift along without any sense of any particular task that you’re working on. You come out of the meditation. Sometimes it feels good. Sometimes it doesn’t feel good. Sometimes the mind settles down. Sometimes it doesn’t settle down. But you don’t have any sense of why, any sense of connection between cause and effect. So try to notice issues. Notice what’s going on. Notice problems. And then try to figure out how to deal with them. So your meditation is not just focused on the present moment, but it’s focused on a larger task. You understand why you’re in the present moment. Because there are so many things you could focus on in the present moment. So many types of breath. So many types of bodily sensations. Which ones are the important ones right now? That’s what matters. Because as insight develops, you find that it gets more and more particular, specific moments, specific events in the mind. You want to watch out for them. It’s not just thinking about things in general and coming to general conclusions. It’s actually seeing specific events in the mind. Okay, you did this just right now, and this is the result that’s happening just right now. Notice that the Buddha’s insight, when he gained awakening, the basic principle of causality just speaks in terms of this and this, this and this. In English we translate it as this and that. But actually the Pali says this and this. When this is, this is. I mean, things that are right there, immediately specific. That’s why it’s called this-that conditionality. I mean, things that you can actually point to. It’s not that he came up with some nice general principles. There was a generality to his principle, but it’s a very specific one. This event relates to that event. And you can get that kind of insight only by being very specific about what’s going on.

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