Analyzing Results

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Sometimes when you meditate, if you try to analyze things too much, you mess yourself up. It’s like being a millipede. If you stop to analyze what you’re doing with each of your legs, you tend to trip over them. So you have to focus simply on doing what you’ve got to do without being worried too much about how the results are going. Have some confidence that simply staying with the breath, resisting the temptation to go wandering off, will eventually bring the mind to peace. It may not seem peaceful in the beginning, but if you stick with it long enough, you will see it. Your determination is what will see you through. But there are other times when you do have to analyze what you’re doing. In other words, try the meditation and see what results you get. And try to see the connection between what you’re doing and the results. In Pali, this is called tamo vijaya. It’s analysis of qualities. The qualities here specifically are skillful and unskillful qualities in the mind. To see what’s skillful and to see what’s not skillful in your mind, you have to notice what kind of results you get. So it’s good, at the end of each meditation, to notice how it went, when the mind was able to settle down. Try to reflect back on what you did, and not just what you did when you meditated, but the mind you brought to the meditation. What did you eat today? What did you talk about today? What did you think about today? How did you try to maintain your mindfulness from one sitting meditation session to the next? Because there is a tendency, while we’re sitting and meditating, that you really are observing. The watchman or the supervisor is working. And then, when you get up from the meditation, the supervisor goes on vacation. You don’t want that. You want to have the ability to keep watch over the mind all the way through the day. As Ajaan Fuang used to say, “Make it agaliko, timeless.” Or Ajaan Mun’s statement, “Practice should be a circle.” A circle doesn’t have any end. It doesn’t have any place where it stops. You just keep going around the day, continually. So, in what ways has riding hard on your mind got you flustered and irritated? In what ways has riding hard on the mind actually helped? Keep it on a short leash, so you don’t have to unwind the long leash that tends to happen when you let it wander off. In other words, when it’s a long leash, it’s going to wind around a bush, wind around telephone poles, wind around trees, and you’re going to have to spend a lot of time untangling it while you settle down to sit and meditate. But if you can keep on a short leash, it’s right there. You sit down and bam, you’re right here. And then, when you’re right here, how do you maintain right here? Because you find that some thoughts come up and they just nibble away at the edge of the mind, and it’s almost as if the mind can brush them off. Nothing much happens. But other thoughts eat right into the center of the mind, and the mind goes out to eat them. And then you’re off someplace else. So try to notice, what’s the difference between the thoughts? Is the difference in the content of the thoughts? Some thoughts really do dig into the mind more than others. And sometimes it’s simply a matter that the strength of your mindfulness, the strength of your alertness, has slipped a little bit and you’ve let your guard down. So try to notice these things. The analysis here doesn’t have to be very deep. We’re not going into psychoanalysis, although you will sometimes, over time, begin to notice larger patterns. But try to notice the specifics. What exactly happened? What exactly did you do? Because many times it’s in the specifics that you can see the pattern. If you jump too quickly to trying to see a general pattern, you miss some interesting details, the telling details. They determine whether you were going to get snared by a thought or not. So for this to become a skill, you have to notice what works and what doesn’t work. What ways of focusing the mind, what things you focus on, what levels of pressure you bring to the focus, get results. And which ones don’t, and which ones get results. You can get results at certain times and not at other times. So try to take note. And over time, you’ll begin to see patterns emerging. You’ll get a better sense of what works in what situation. This is what makes the meditation a skill. As I said at the beginning, though, there are times when too much analysis just gets in the way. You’ve just got to put it aside and do what you think is going to work at this particular point in time and place. Or, as the Buddha says, analysis of qualities is one of those factors of waking that sometimes is called for and other times actually gets in the way. It’s analysis with fire. There are times when the mind is sluggish and it needs a little analysis to gain some understanding, to gain some clarity. When it’s too active, though, the analysis just makes it overactive even more. So try to get a sense of time and place for this element in your meditation. This analogy is with fire. When the fire is dying out, you don’t pour more dust on top of it, because that just puts it out totally. When it’s dying out, then you need to add more fuel. That’s the analogy for analysis of qualities. In other words, when it’s sluggish, you need to energize it. When the fire is burning at too high a rate, then you don’t want to add more fuel. That’s the time when you might want to pour a little dust on it. In other words, just be still. Be still as much as you can. Focus on what you’re doing, doing, doing, and don’t spend a lot of time analyzing the results. This way you get a clearer and clearer sense of what exactly is skillful in the meditation. The meditation does become more of a skill. This is how you become more and more your own teacher. Observe what’s working and what’s not, what needs to be done and what needs to be dropped, because no one else can peer into your mind. Even people who can read your mind can’t necessarily tell what’s going to work. They can have an idea and they may have an intimation, but the details of what works and what doesn’t work, those are things you have to determine for yourself. This is how you do it, seeing cause and effect. Sometimes the causes and effects are simple little things. Eating a certain food may have an effect on the mind. Talking about a certain topic may have an effect on the mind. So keep watching. Be observant in an all-around way. This is how the practice of concentration can lead to discernment, to sharpening your discernment. Concentration helps each other along.

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