Rest & Recuperation

May 27, 2010

Many of us have come here to rest and recuperate from the values of our society, from all the activity, from all the damage that happens. When we live in a culture that’s driven by defilement, of course, there’s a lot of defilement. As we come out here, we find that the defilement is not only in other people. We have our own defilements, and they’re sitting right here with us. They’re hovering around the meditation. Some of them are actually spurring us on to meditate, and some of them are getting in the way. This is why the rest of the meditation is not just simply relaxation. It’s a sense of rest that comes when you are approaching a task you know is a good task, something that really is healing, something that really is helpful. And simply the fact that you realize, “Okay, this is something that’s going to be helpful,” that’s giving the mind a sense or a measure of rest right now. But for deeper rest, for deeper recuperation, we have to work. This is the discipline. After all, as I said, the defilements were not left in your car when you came here, or were not left back home. They’re here right now. And you have to learn how to say no to them. You have to learn how to recognize them for what they are. They’ll come in and nibble away at your concentration. And when the concentration is still small and just getting started, that means they eat it all up. So you have to find some reserves of energy. This is why we work with the breath from the very beginning. Because you may find that one of the things that’s keeping you tired, keeping you worn out, is the fact that your breathing is wearing you out. This is why Ajaan Lee has you start with a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths to raise the breath energy in the body. And to be conscious of how the breathing feels as the whole body processes. This helps get you out of your head and out of the conversation among your defilements. It gives you something viscerally pleasant to focus on and something energizing as well. Because you need the energy to do the work. So it’s not just resting. There’s an element of discipline and an element of work that has to go here. And so a lot of it lies in learning how to make the work enjoyable. Thinking of different ways to make it interesting. Thinking of different ways to make it appealing to yourself. What kind of breathing would be fun right now? Which part of the body is not getting enough breath energy? What ways could you conceive of the breath so it could get some energy? Does the energy have to come from the top? Does it have to come from the bottom? Where is it coming from? Where are your sources of energy right now? One of the surprises you find as you meditate is that you do have different sources of energy in your body or around your body that you haven’t tapped into yet. Just pose that question in your mind. Where is there a source of energy now that I’ve been missing? Or in what way is my breathing depleting my energy? Can I breathe in a way that gives more energy? That gives more refreshment? That gives a greater sense of nourishment? As long as the mind is going to think, have it think in these terms. If it sits around with nothing else to do, it’s going to start getting into trouble. So once you’ve explored the larger energy issues in the body, you move down to the more precise ones. Go through your fingers, go through your toes. Try to make your exploration of the body as detailed as possible. You may find that an interesting place to get involved is in your spine. There are lots of vertebrae, lots of little muscles in the spine. Which ones are permanently stiff? Maybe they could use some breath right now. What way of breathing would allow breath energy to get in and energize them? Allow them to relax a bit. Or you can go around your face. There are lots of little tiny muscles in your face. Are they all getting properly energized by the breath? You want to be careful here, because you often find that tension in different parts of the face often corresponds to different thought patterns. As soon as you work on that, the thought pattern will come up, and it’s very tempting to go with it. Keep your frame of reference in mind. You’re here with the breath. You’re here with the body. Whatever images go flashing around, just think of them as none of your business right now. Just one other exhalation of the body that you don’t have to get involved in. So there’s lots you can do right now to keep yourself occupied, to keep yourself active in the present moment. But it’s the kind of activity that is restful. You’re working on one thing—staying right here. There are not a lot of complicated thoughts, not a lot of complicated issues you have to worry about. And thinking about the breath is a different kind of thinking. It uses a different part of your brain. So even though our desire is to relax, if you just sit here relaxing, relaxing, relaxing, you’re going to fall asleep. And that’s not going to accomplish anything better than if you’d gone to bed. In fact, it’s a little bit less because you’re sitting up and you don’t get quite the sleep you’d get if you were lying down. But we’re not here to sleep. We’re here to stay awake, to learn things, to watch things. So if you find getting the mind in a nice steady gaze right now is soporific, you say, “Okay, I’ve got to turn around. I’ve got things to explore here.” But explore in the sense of the body. As I said, it uses a different part of your nervous system, it uses a different part of the brain. And try to develop the fascination with the breath that you have with other things. It’s not the case that most people, when they go home from work, go straight to sleep. They want to watch a movie on TV, they want to read something that captures their interest. And all too often it’s what captures the interest of your defilements, your greed, your lust. How is it that you can spend lots and lots of time looking at things that provoke your lust, provoke your anger, provoke your greed, your fear, and yet not have the energy to sit and watch your breath and get involved in the healing of your body, the healing of your mind? It’s because it hasn’t yet captured your imagination. So start asking some questions about this energy body you have here that you’ve been ignoring. What can it do for you right now? What can you learn about it? It’s a lot more useful than the things you could read about or see on TV or on the internet. At the very least, you’re giving yourself some free health care. The better the breath energy flows throughout the body, the more healthy you’re going to be. So it’s a skill you want to master. It helps if you can let it capture your imagination. Just keep thinking about different ways of doing it. If one way of breathing gets boring after a while, try another one. If breathing in one part of the body seems to have taken care of that part of the body, we’ll see which other parts of your body are not up to par yet. In other words, keep looking around as long as you stay within the context of the body. You’re right here, where the work should be done, where the work is healing. That’s one of the tests you can have for it. If your meditation feels nourishing, it feels energizing, you’re on the right track. If not, you can start looking around to see what else you can play with in terms of the breath, in terms of the energy in the body that you haven’t been working with yet. There’s lots to do here, lots of healing that needs to be done. And it’s not just by settling down and drifting off into a soporific state. That’s not going to do the work. The work is done by being alert, by being mindful, by being clear about what you’re doing. We’re here to train the mind. It requires discipline, but the discipline is sustained. If you learn how to nourish yourself all along the way, it’s sustainable. So nourish the mind with thoughts of how much you want to do this. Nourish the body with the breath. Now we come out of the meditation feeling rested and recuperated and ready for more. you

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