Right Resolve of the Breath

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Right resolve and right concentration go together, which ends just now. Right resolve is the resolve to release yourself from sensuality, to be free of ill will, to be free of harmfulness. And the best expression of that is to bring the mind to stillness on a topic that has a sensuality to it all. The breath coming in, the breath going out. It’s what they call form. It’s your sense of the body as you feel it from within. And what do you feel? You’ve got the energy of the breath moving. There’s the movement of the liquid parts of the body, there’s the solidity of the body, and there’s the warmth. Those are the kinds of sensations you have that allow you to know you’ve got a body sitting here. So we’re going to focus on the breath. It’s the energy flow in the body. We’re going to allow it to be as comfortable as possible. You might ask yourself, “What kind of breathing would feel really good right now? What would feel really refreshing in your chest? What would feel really refreshing in your abdomen?” When you breathe in, say you breathe in long, does it get tense in your shoulders? Can you breathe in long without tensing? Do you find that your hands tense up as you breathe in? Can you breathe in without tensing them up? And so on through the different parts of the body. Because the energy permeates every part of the body. If there weren’t the energy there, that part of the body would be paralyzed. So every place where you have a feeling of body, that’s breath. And think of the breath as your primary interface between the mind and the body. This is what you first experience in the body as the energy. We tend to think of the body as primarily solid, and the breath as something you pull in and out of this solid body. But the longer you hold that perception in the mind, the more difficult the breathing becomes. So think of your sense of the body as primarily an energy field, which expands and contracts, swells and whatever the opposite of swells is. And as you go through the body, ask yourself, “What would feel really good right here? What would feel really good right there?” Take a tour of the body to begin with. And it’s important that you develop a sense of interest in the breath. Remember, the way you breathe is going to have an effect on how the different organs of the body function. And if the breath feels comfortable, it’s going to be easier for the mind to stay here. The way you breathe affects your posture. There’s an impact on all kinds of things happening in the body. So you want to learn how to do this well. It’s a skill that you can develop. It’s one of those skills that we tend to overlook. How to breathe well. So it’s good both for the body and for the mind. Think of your awareness being bathed by the breath, too. It’s not like you’re sitting outside of the breath, watching it. Your awareness is inside the breathing. So think of it being all around you. Breathing down the back, not the legs. Loosening up any tightness you may feel in the pelvis, in your knees, in your ankles, down through the feet. It’s something that’s right here for everyone. And it’s something that most people overlook. And it has a huge impact, not only on the physical health of the body, but also the state of your mind. If the breath feels tight and constricted, the mind’s going to feel tight and constricted. You’re carrying around a lot of unnecessary stress, a lot of unnecessary pressure, and it’s very easy for the mind to get into a bad mood that way. So here it is, something free. Always present. As long as you’re alive here with this body, the breath is always there to work with. And you want to make it your friend. As with any friend, you want to listen to what the breath needs. We tend to come to the breath with a lot of preconceived notions and force it into those notions without really paying attention to whether that’s really good for the breath. So can you listen to the breathing? So as you’re focusing on the breath, you’re actually doing two things. You’re making up your mind to stay with the breath, and you’re evaluating the results. That’s what the listening means. It’s like chanting. You’re not just chanting with your mouth. You’re also trying to listen to everybody else to make sure that what you’re chanting is in line with everyone else. As you put your listening and your doing together, things go a lot more smoothly. You get quicker and quicker to notice that the breath right here doesn’t feel good, the breath right there doesn’t feel good. There’s this unnecessary tension building up as you breathe in. It might be in the back, it could be in the shoulders, the back of the neck. Go through the head. Think of the breath going through all the different muscles of the head. Check that out. There are lots of things you could explore. You read of John Lee’s dharma talks. After he started really working in earnest for the breath, he lived for another ten years, and his dharma talks show that he would often reconceive the way the breath energy worked in the body. Sometimes he’d conceive the in-breath as a force coming up the back, up through the spine. This was useful when his back was feeling weak. The breath would support it. Other times the breath would go from the back of the skull down the spine. He had lots of different ways of thinking about the breath, playing with the breath. And the playing here is like a child’s play. If a child doesn’t get to play, doesn’t get to develop its imagination, its growth is going to be stunted. You try things out when you play. You need a space to experiment, gain a sense of your own capabilities. And you get to learn how to listen yourself. That’s the same with the breath. There are no hard and fast rules about how you should breathe. You’ve got a whole hour here to do nothing but learn about your breath energy. And see what happens when you think of breath as being something that permeates the whole body, out through the toes, out through the fingers. Finding where there are areas of blockage, seeing how you can get around them, or breathing through them. Be careful not to force the breath too much, because that can easily cause headaches. Think of the breath as being totally unimpeded. It surrounds the body in a cocoon, permeates the body. John Lee talks of the mist of atoms that can permeate solid walls. Well, think of the breath as being something that could permeate rock. So even though there may be parts of the body that feel tense, don’t let the breath seem blocked by them. Keep it in mind that it can permeate those parts too. This way you’re showing goodwill for yourself. The mind is free from any interest in sensual matters. But the mind does have a strong sense of pleasure. There was a period in the Buddha’s life before he was the Buddha. He had an image one night that to gain any success in the path to the end of suffering, you had to remove your mind from sensuality. And he misinterpreted that. He thought you had to remove your mind from all pleasure, because he thought that those were the only kinds of pleasures there were, sensual pleasures. It wasn’t until he realized after tormenting himself for many years that there was an alternative kind of pleasure that was not involved with sensuality. And this is it. This is what he was exploring on the night of his awakening. He wasn’t harming himself. He wasn’t showing any ill will to himself. He wasn’t desiring any kind of suffering. And focusing here, he was also showing goodwill to others. He wasn’t harming them either. Because you’ll notice when you’ve been meditating well, the mind settles down, there’s a sense of well-being, you come out, and you wouldn’t want to harm anybody. You wouldn’t want to hurt anybody. You don’t feel any need for anybody in the world to suffer, to compensate for your own suffering. And that’s what a lot of it is. Our cruelty to others is based on our own suffering. We’ve got to learn how to soften up things inside, refresh things inside, strengthen things inside, whatever’s needed. You have the sense of well-being that you can tap into whenever you want it. Why would you want to wish anyone ill? Just the thought itself would be a burden on the mind. So it’s in this way that, when the mind gets concentrated, it’s developing right resolve and carrying that right resolve through. It’s in this way that the different factors of the path all start coming together, as all your awareness begins to have a sense that it can start coming together. You don’t have to have your thoughts and awareness of things fragmented a little bit here, a little bit there. Everything comes together right here. It has a good homing place where everything fits snugly, where everything feels like it has its place, a sense of wellness and wholeness inside. It comes from really getting in touch with the breath, listening to what the body needs and providing it in a way that doesn’t cost any money. It just takes time to learn this skill. But it’s an investment that’s rewarded many times over. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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