A Strong Post

February 16, 2012

When there’s a dhammatalk while you’re meditating, give most of your attention to the meditation. Let the dhammatalk be in the background. It’s like a fence. If you leave the breath, you run into the dhammatalk, and that reminds you to go back to the breath. And if there’s anything that’s relevant to your meditation, it’ll come into the mind without your having to send your attention out to pick it up. As for things that are not relevant to your meditation, don’t let them interfere with the meditation right now. Try to stay with your breath. Try to explore how the breathing feels in the present moment. It can be your refuge as you go through the day, so you want to get familiar with it, firmly established inside. The Buddha compares our senses to six different animals. We have snakes, we have crocodiles, we have monkeys, we have dogs, we have jackals, we have birds. It’s like you have six of these animals tied together with a little leash. And the Buddha said, if the leashes are not tied to a post, something firmly planted in the ground, then the animals are all going to pull off in their different directions. The bird’s going to fly up in the air, the monkey wants to go to the tree, the crocodile wants to go down to the river, the dog wants to go into the village, the jackal wants to go into the cremation ground. And depending on whichever one of them is the strongest, it pulls all the rest, which means that there’s no peace at all. They’re constantly being pulled around like this. Whereas if you tie them all to a post, then even though they may pull, eventually they have to give up because they can’t get anywhere away from the post. So they just lie down right next to the post, and everything calms down. The Buddha said the post here is like mindfulness of the body, or mindfulness immersed in the body, like we’re doing right now. Try to be as fully aware of the body as you can, and how the breath energy feels. When you breathe in, think of the energy swelling up in the body. When you breathe out, don’t think of the energy leaving the body. The energy stays in the body. It’s just the air that goes out. Try to make that distinction. Otherwise, we’re huffing and puffing. We don’t gain much sense of fullness or much sense of ease out of the breathing. But if you think of the energy staying in the body, all the good energy stays, and only the bad energy goes. After all, there’s a sense of fullness. John Fuang used to talk about having the body full of breath. Of course, I would try to fill up my lungs and hold them in that way, which, of course, didn’t last very long. I began to realize when he was talking about the body being full of breath energy, meaning that the flow of the blood from the body is allowed to be relaxed. All the tension of the body is relaxed, and you don’t squeeze the energy out of the body when you breathe out. Let the energy stay, filling every little cell in the body, every little nook and cranny in the body. And only the air goes out when you breathe out. That helps to give rise to a sense of fullness. It helps you to feel that you can occupy all of your body. Your awareness can fill the body. This is useful in all kinds of ways. The skills we learn as we’re sitting here meditating are not just for sitting with our eyes closed. They’re for us to use as we go through the day. Because it’s not just now that your mind will wander around. It wanders around all the time. And especially when you’re away from the monastery and you don’t have the environment that helps encourage you to meditate. If you allow your attention to go out through your senses, everything gets depleted very fast. So you’ve got to maintain some attention inside the body. The more comfortable it can be, the healthier the sense of energy you have in the body, then the easier it is to go through the day and not get scarred by sights or sounds or smells or tastes or tactile sensations or ideas. And they don’t invade your space. You have a sense of your own territory here. It’s protected by the energy. It’s like you have an energy field around you. That’s the kind of quality of energy you want to develop as you’re sitting here and that you try to develop as you go through the day. We talk about being mindful throughout the day. Well, it’s a lot easier when there’s a sense of well-being in the body, a sense of energy that’s just right. Not too hyper, not too… relaxed, not too strong, not too weak. Try to get a sense of what feels just right in the body right now. And your sense of just right will change according to the needs of the body. So try to be sensitive to that as well. The more sensitive you are in here, the more you can figure out what needs to be done in terms of allowing the energy to move around. You don’t push it around. If you push it around, that destroys the quality of the energy that you’re trying to maintain. One of the words they use in Thay is nom, which means basically to invite. Invite the energy to move in a way that’s really nice. And if it doesn’t want to, let’s allow it to stay wherever it is for the time being. But think of allowing everything in the body to connect. All the channels of breath energy that go through the nerves. Think of everything being wide open so that energy needs to move in any direction. There are no obstacles. Nothing is standing in the way. Then there’s a greater sense of well-being that comes as you fully inhabit the body and allow the breath energy to fully nourish the body. Then as you deal with the difficulties of life, all the changes that we meet with, all the difficult people, difficulties come to people we love. We’ll be in a better position. We don’t have to be depleted by these events. We’ll have a certain inner strength that we can bring to the event. It’s our gift to the event. So we’re not the only ones benefiting from this, even though other people may not be able to enjoy the sensation of the breath energy in the body. The fact that we’re stronger having this sensation inside and we can maintain it inside means that we’ll be less likely to act in unskillful ways, less tempted to give in to our greed or aversion or delusion as they come welling up in the mind. The Pali word asava means “things that flow out.” Sometimes central desire flows out of the mind, or a particular view flows out of the mind, or an idea of who we are flows out of the mind. And if we’re not really aware, really mindful, really alert, we’re not just flowing along with whatever. It’s usually just flowing out the senses. It’s only when we see what we do under the influence of these outflows, these effluents, that we realize that we’ve left our center. And we may have caused problems not only for ourselves but also for other people. It’s because we’re not really paying attention to what’s coming out of the mind. But if you can stay right here—and the Buddha and one of the teachers in Thailand said that sense of the mind flowing out the senses, that suffering right there—your attention goes out, latches onto things outside. And usually it’s from a sense of weakness or a sense of lack or a sense of wanting. When the mind is feeling weak like that, it’s very rare that it’s going to deal with a situation in a skillful way. The mind is hungry. It goes out looking for things. But if you feed it well with breath energy here in the present moment, it’s a lot less hungry, a lot less likely to feed on unskillful things. That’s why you’re in better shape. The people around you are in better shape as well. So even though you can’t take the monastery with you, at least take this skill with you for developing a good sense of energy inside and fully inhabiting the body with your awareness. Think of your awareness spreading out to the skin and out beyond the skin. And the same with the breath energy, filling the body, creating a zone of breath energy that surrounds the body and acts as your protection. And next is a solid post. So when the animals go out your eyes and ears and nose and tongue and body and mind, they can’t go far. There’s a post right here that they’re all tied to. So even though you can know things outside, your desires don’t go flowing out to those things. Your sense of hunger and the need to feed doesn’t go flowing out. You’re perfectly fine. You’re perfectly content to feed here inside because you’ve got good food that you’re creating for the mind right here inside. As long as the mind needs to feed, allow it to feed here. Allow it to create a sense of fullness, well-being, inside. It’s one of the most important skills you can develop.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2012/120216_A_Strong_Post.mp3>