A Mind Like Earth(med-fi)

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When the Buddha taught breath meditation to his son, he practiced it with a few other exercises. One of the more important ones is the one where he tells him to make his mind like earth. You can throw disgusting things on earth and earth doesn’t get upset. You can pour perfume on earth and the earth wouldn’t be pleased. It’s just there. You want to try to develop that same quality of mind as you meditate. This doesn’t mean you just sit there and do nothing, but what it does mean is you try to have a certain kind of solidity. Try not to get excited when things are going well and try not to get upset when they’re not going well. You’re here to learn. You’re here to observe. And sometimes you’ll be observing the mind when it’s really with a breath, very easily, almost effortlessly. And other times you’re going to be observing the mind doing a lot of things you don’t want to watch it doing, but you want to learn the patience to watch the mind in this way. Don’t try to run away from the mind when it’s in a bad mood. You’re not going to know it. The bad moods will take over. It’ll be a mystery. You want to make this observer as continuous and as solid as possible. So you can notice when things are going well, why they’re going well. When they’re not going well, why they’re not going well. And then learn from what you’ve seen. Apply it to the meditation. If you notice that the mind has trouble staying with long breathing, well, you can change it. Try short breathing. Deeper breathing, more shallow, heavier, lighter. Or maybe you’re focused on a point that’s not quite right for you. You might be focused on the nose and you feel like you’re getting a headache. Focus further down in the body, down around the chest, down around the navel. And if that doesn’t work, you can try the back. In other words, you’re experimenting here. This is why the Buddha recommends that you make your mind solid, because if you’re going to be experimenting, you have to become a reliable observer. Not jump to quick conclusions. You can’t be impatient. You can’t let yourself get upset. This doesn’t mean you don’t have preferences. You do have preferences. You want the mind to be solid. You want it to be still and clear. But you can’t let your preferences make you impatient. Like someone trying to pick a lock, you have to be very, very patient. Try this, try that, and finally you get the right combination. If you just try to jam the lock, you’ll get stuck and the lock will never open. If you try a few different things and nothing works and you just give up, well, you won’t be able to unlock the lock. You have to be patient. Keep at it, keep at it, keep at it. This quality of solidity is really useful. And where are you going to get this solidity? All you have to do is be aware. That’s something the mind is very good at. It’s always aware, aware, aware. The problem is we’re covering up the awareness with all of our emotional reactions. In the beginning of the meditation, you may be bringing issues in from events of the day—what so-and-so said, or what you said, or what happened to this person, or what this person did to you, or what you might be doing tomorrow. It takes a while to clear those issues away. Then you find yourself getting all emotional around the meditation. You get impatient. Fifteen minutes of concentration, and you say, “Okay, what’s next?” Well, concentration is something that takes hours to perfect. And one of the important lessons you learn from concentration is that you have to keep at it as long as you can. Try to maintain the concentration even when you get up for the meditation. Do a walking meditation or engage in chores or whatever. The lessons you’re going to learn from concentration are not from hopping off the concentration to some other step. We’re trying to maintain the concentration in the midst of all different kinds of activities. This requires patience. You may find that after a really good period of concentration, you’re suddenly down in the dumps. You have to watch that. You have to ask yourself, one, was the concentration really there? Was it really as good as it could have been? Were you forcing the breath too much, trying to make it too quiet? Maybe that has a depressive effect on the body over time. Or you may find simply that you missed the easy bliss of the concentration. Everything was so easy and came so well, and everything seemed so refreshing, and now it’s not there. We have to observe the mind as it’s complaining. But not get involved in the complaints. That way they lose their power. This is an inevitable part of the concentration. It becomes the focal point of all your emotional ups and downs. After all, what you want to see is your greed, aversion, and delusion. If you don’t see them clearly, you’re not going to be able to deal with them. So you start gathering around the concentration. The practice itself, in your impatience, or in your depression, or in your carelessness, whatever. So you need that solidity of the mind like earth, a really solid observer, to be able to watch these things and not get carried away. The observer is going to be the foundation that carries you through all the ups and downs. And it’s right there. Just observe, see, note what’s going on. Admit to yourself what’s going on. There’s a lot more energy expended in not admitting to yourself what’s going on. There’s a lot more energy expended in getting involved in the emotional ups and downs. That can wear you out. Just observe. And in the observing, you begin to see, “This is what works. This is what doesn’t work. This is what’s connected to that. That’s what’s connected to this.” And then your control of the concentration becomes less a matter of brute force. It becomes more of a skill. That’s when you can really rely on it. You can rely on any skills that you’ve mastered, especially physical skills, the ones that require patience, that ones that require time, and that require that you be very observant and not let your emotions get in the way. This is an important point. We tend to think that if you’re just going to watch and then you just leave things as they are, that’s not the purpose of watching. The purpose of watching is so you can see how things are connected, to see what works and what doesn’t work, getting the mind to be still and getting you to understand what’s going on in the mind, to gain some insight into the way you’re impatient, to gain some insight into the way you get depressed, to gain some insight into the way you get careless. One of the times when the mind gets a little bit quiet, you start thinking about, “Gee, I could do all these wonderful things for other people now that my mind is quiet.” Well, wait a minute. Your mind has only been quiet a few seconds. In some ways, this idea of a still observer may sound a little scary. Someone who doesn’t get sad when you’re sad, doesn’t get happy when you’re happy. But you have to remember, it’s there. It’s there for a purpose. It’s not just being stone-cold dead. It’s trying to watch so it really can understand things. Behind the observer is that desire. You really want to overcome the problem of suffering, and you want to do it well. You want to do it right this time around. We’ve been working at this who knows how many lifetimes, and this time you want to get it right. The solidity of the observer is not dead, it’s mature. So try to bring as much maturity as you can to the practice, so that not only will the observer be solid, but also the results will be solid as well.

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