Worker, Observer, Enjoyer

January 16, 2017

Try to take care as you watch the breath. Take care of the breath, take care of the mind. Start with a couple of good long, deep, in-and-out breaths. Notice where you feel it. And if it feels good, keep it up. If not, you can change the rhythm. Make it even longer or shorter. Deeper, more shallow. Heavier, lighter. Faster, slower. Think of the whole body breathing. The breath energy can come in and out anywhere in the body at all. If you feel any knots of tension or patterns of tightness in the body, see if you can relax them so the whole torso is involved with the breathing. If it’s constricted in any spot, that’s taking care of the breath. Taking care of the mind means you watch over how the mind is going. Is the mind with the breath or is it about to leave? If it’s about to leave, gently bring it right back. One of the reasons why it may be leaving is it’s lost interest in the breath. So ask yourself other questions about the breath. How deep can it go? Can you get it to go in parts of the body that it wouldn’t ordinarily go? If you have any pains or illnesses in the body, think of the breath energy helping with those areas. Any thoughts that are not related to the breath right now, you can just let go. You don’t have to chase them away. Just don’t pay them any mind. Be like a radio that tunes in just to one frequency, even though it’s not the other frequencies going through the air. The fact that you’re with that one frequency means the others don’t really matter. And as the mind begins to settle down with the breath, you’ve got to be very careful to keep things in balance. Because when we’re working with the breath like this and the mind does start to settle down, it’s as if there are still three minds in there. There’s the mind doing the work. In other words, it directs your attention to the breath. And then, if you feel things are not right, you adjust the breath. That’s the worker in the mind. And then there’s the enjoyer, the one who simply likes to have the pleasure, the peace. And then there’s the observer, the one who’s watching over the work. That’s the one that has to be in charge. If the worker takes over, there’s a lot of busyness going on. There’s not very much peace or calm. If the consumer takes over, the one who’s trying to enjoy it, then you begin to lose focus. And it can be very quiet, very pleasant. But that’s the state of mind that, as soon as you notice that it’s pleasant, you lose it. And you’ve lost the focus. The observer has to be the one in charge, looking after the other two. So you’ve got two of the parts of the mind and the breath to watch over. They seem like a lot, but at least it’s enough to keep you occupied. You don’t want to bring yourself back. Because when the sense of ease does come, on the one hand you do want to enjoy it, but on the other hand you don’t want to forget how you got there. If you weren’t really paying attention, if your observer was weak at that point and the consumer and the enjoyer were taking over, you’ll come out and you can’t remember how you got there. Sometimes you lose focus to the point where you don’t even know where the breath is. You come out and you wonder if you’re awake or asleep. That’s delusion concentration. You’ve got to watch out for that. Give the mind work to do when it gets comfortable, because that’s the whole point of the comfort that comes from the meditation. On the one hand, it does soothe the mind, but on the other, it’s supposed to give strength to the more active side of the body, the more active side of the mind, particularly the mind that’s going to be analyzing things and understanding things. Because you do want to see cause and effect as you meditate. That was the essence of the Buddha’s awakening. He boiled everything down to just a very brief statement of the awakening. It was, “When there is this, there is that. From the arising of this comes the arising of that. When this isn’t, that isn’t. From the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.” A pretty dry causal formula. But it’s the essence of his insight. To see exactly what causes what, you can take that knowledge and create some causes that will lead you to the end of suffering. You’ve got to see both sides, the causes and the effects. That’s why the observer has to be constantly there. That’s your alertness, watching over what you’re doing. That’s what you’re doing, watching over the results you’re getting. And then the worker, your ardency, does whatever has to be done to bring things into balance. And as you notice the back and forth here, you begin to see, “This causes that, that causes this.” And as Ajaan Lee says, that’s when you really get discernment. If you see causes without knowing their effects, that’s not discernment. If you see effects without knowing their causes, that’s not discernment either. You’ve got to see them together, which requires a lot of alertness. So learn how to be alert at the same time you’re feeling comfortable. This takes a little extra effort in the powers of your observation, because often it feels like you’re falling asleep. The breath gets more and more refined, there are few things impinging on the mind, and part of the mind takes this as sleep. As a signal, it’s time to go to sleep. And it drifts off, and it enjoys the sense of ease, the sense of having no burdens for the time being. Allow it to enjoy it, but at the same time, don’t let yourself fall asleep. Don’t lose that observer inside, because otherwise the meditation will be no more helpful than sleep. It has purposes, but everybody sleeps all over the world, but nobody has slept their way to awakening. Nobody has slept their way to understanding. It’s the alertness that allows you to see things. So keep the observer strong so that you can detect any imbalances. Bring them back into balance. And it’s in that way that the meditation becomes a skill. Otherwise it’s just like a crapshoot. Today you win, tomorrow you lose. And there’s no rhyme or reason, it’s all very random, because your attention is random. The observer is there sometimes and sometimes not. Sometimes it checks out and falls in with the consumer, the enjoyer, that just likes the peace. So keep it separate, just separate enough so you can keep tabs on what’s happening, so that when things do get comfortable and things settle down and there is a sense of well-being, you know how you got there. Leave it and you know how you can get back. That’s one of the ways in which knowing cause and effect is really useful. Because things do have their causes, and you want to learn how to manipulate them so that you can get the results you want. That’s not called craving. That’s called generating desire to give rise to what’s skillful and to maintain what’s skillful. It’s all part of the path.

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