Bases of Success

October 1, 2017

When you’re focusing on the breath, you want to make it an interesting place to be, a pleasant place to be. Because the mind doesn’t have a pleasant place, it’s going to go running outside, looking for food, looking for shelter, and things that really are not good food or good shelter. You want to feed it with a breath. You want to give it shelter with a breath. Take time to take an interest in what kind of breathing really is good for the body. And you’re thinking of the breath not just as air coming in and out through the nose, but also the energy flow in the body. And how different rates of breathing, whether it’s fast, slow, heavy, light. Deep, shallow, have an impact on the body and an impact on the mind. If you take an interest in this, you’ll begin to see it really does have an impact. And then you can use that to your advantage. So do what you can to make the breath interesting. It’s the first and what the Buddha calls the basis of success, is wanting to do it. This is the basis of success. Actually, in any endeavor at all, you have to want to do something for it to happen. But as the Buddha said specifically, he’s concerned with the desire that gives rise to concentration. Learn how to balance that desire. It’s not so strong that you’re only thinking about that desire. It’s not so weak that you just say, “Well, I’ll just be okay with whatever comes up.” You have to want to do this well for it to really happen. That’s the first base of success. The second one is when you actually put in the effort. You’re persistent. You put energy into this. You keep sticking with it. If you haven’t figured out how to make the breath comfortable, you keep at it. When the breath is comfortable, then the next thing is to figure out how to maintain that sense of comfort. And then as you can maintain it, what’s the best use of it? In terms of developing concentration, the Buddha recommends that you spread that sense of ease to the body. It’s like working water through flour to make dough. You want to make sure that all the flour is moistened. In the same way, you want the sense of ease and well-being of the breath to go throughout the body. Wherever it doesn’t go easily, you think of releasing tension. Where’s the tension that’s getting in the way? You find that. You let the tension go. Let the tension go down the back, go down the legs. Down the arms, through the torso, through the head. In other words, you don’t just sit with a nice feeling of ease, but you put it to use. You work with it. This requires two other bases of success. As you try to do this, pay as much attention as you can to what you’re doing. Give it your full attention. So you can be sensitive to the little things that let you know, “Now the breath is too long, now it’s too short.” Or if you’re trying to push things in the body too much, the body will tell you. There’ll be a reaction. So you want to be very sensitive. And finally, vimamsa, which can be translated different ways. It’s basically using your discernment, using your ingenuity. If something is not working, try to figure out what’s going wrong. Is the problem with the breath? Is the problem with the mind? Is the problem with the perception that you’re trying to hold in mind as you keep the breath and the mind together? How can you adjust these things? You can read in the books, you can learn lessons from Dhamma talks, but sometimes you have to figure these things out yourself. This is how the mind gets into concentration, how it develops that sense of being at home here. Basically those are the last two of the basis of success. There are things that Ajahn Fung would stress more than anything else. The two words he used most as he was teaching meditation were, “One, be observant.” That fits in with the third of the basis of success. And the other was, “Use your ingenuity.” That fits in with the fourth. You’re trying to develop this as a skill. And as with any skill, the more interest you take in it, the more you want to do it, and the more effort you’ll put into it. In this way, all the basis of success—desire, persistence, intent, and your powers of ingenuity—all work together. So you really do get results. The fact that you’re meditating really does make a difference. You’re not just watching things coming and going and just sitting there and accepting them and saying, “Well, that’s just the way it is.” You’ve got potentials here that you can develop if you pay attention to them, bring a desire to make the most of them, are persistent, pay attention, and use your ingenuity. It’ll get built. It’ll get completed. It will give you the shelter you need. And you’ll find that it’s well-stocked with food, well-stocked with all kinds of things that you need inside. So really give your heart to this, because it is the most important of all the skills that you can master. you

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