Your Territory (outdoors)

July 25, 2018

Start out with a couple of good, long, deep in-and-out breaths. That’s to energize the body and to make the breathing process really clear. It’s the deep breaths and the long breaths. When you feel the process of breathing most intensely, notice how it feels. We tend to approach the breath with the notion that we’re pulling the air into the nose. Sometimes there’s actually a sense of pulling in the head to get the breath in, but the head doesn’t have to do any pulling at all. In fact, there are lots of different ways of conceiving the breath. You can think of it as the air coming in and out through the nose. It comes in and out because you’ve expanded the lungs and the abdomen, sometimes the back. This means that the expansion of the lungs and the abdomen is actually causing the air. In fact, it’s that expansion, the energy that allows parts of the body to expand, that’s what we’re going to focus on. In other words, it’s more the energy in the body than the air that’s being brought in. In that sense, the breath actually begins inside. John Lee lists a few spots that he calls the resting spots of the breath. They’re just above the navel, the tip of the breastbone, base of the throat, middle of the head, top of the head. See if you have a sense that the breath energy is emanating from any one of these spots. Whichever spot is clearest, focus on that one. Make sure that that spot feels wide open. There’ll be a sense of well-being, even sometimes a sense of fullness if you do. Think of that full breath energy being protected right there. Then the energy that flows out from there, check to see if there are any tight spots or tense spots in the body that prevent it from spreading out. See if you can relax those. As for any pains in the body, just don’t pay them any attention. Any sounds outside that distract you, just think of them going right through you. Think of your awareness as being like a big screen, not a window. The breeze can go right through the screen. The screen doesn’t catch the breeze, and the breeze doesn’t disturb the screen. The sounds are there, but they’re just doing their own thing. You’re right here. This is what you want to maintain, the sense of you being right here, and that nothing in the world is more important than this right now. We’re trying to give the mind a good foundation so it has a place where it feels at home. It’s not being pushed out by other things. What better place to feel at home than your own sense of your body as you feel it from within, your awareness as you feel it from within? Because this is really yours. Nobody else can come in and know this for you. Researchers can put electrodes all over your brain and all over your skin. They can read the impulses, but they still don’t know what’s going on inside you. They have to ask you first, “What are you thinking about? What are you feeling?” if they want to know how to interpret those signals. You’re the expert right here. You’re the owner right here. This is your space. So make it a space where you want to stay. Now we’re basically here to learn about the mind, but we have to give the mind something to focus on so we can watch it clearly. You’ve got the mind in one spot, and then you can see when it moves from that spot. Otherwise, it’s moving all over the place all day long and you’re just chasing around after it. So it’s the mind chasing the mind. And it’s very hard to see who’s moving where. It’s like clouds chasing clouds up in the sky. Some clouds are going east, some clouds are going west. If you’re lying out here on the pad looking up, don’t make any reference to any of the trees or the buildings around you. You can look up at the clouds and you have no idea which clouds are stable and which clouds are moving, because you don’t have a reference point. But if you focus, say, at the peak of the Sala, one of the palm trees, it would be very easy to see which clouds are moving, which clouds are not, and which direction they are moving—east, north, west, south. It’s the same with the mind. If you give it the breath as a point of reference, then you can see when it moves. You see things coming and going. When things are coming, how they form, how there’s a little stirring of energy someplace in the body. It’s kind of at the interface between where the body and the mind meet. In the beginning, it’s hard to say whether it’s a thought or a physical sensation. It’s halfway between the two. But say you decide it’s a thought. You slap on a perception. This is a thought about X, which could be in the future or the past or the present. And then you start running with it. Now are you going to see that? Because many times we don’t see a thought until it’s fully formed. But to see the beginning stages, you’ve got to be with the breath, you’ve got to be still. The same with things passing away. Sometimes anger comes into the mind and then it’s gone. But while it was there, it stirred up some hormones in your blood. Those hormones are going to keep you on edge for a while. And then the mind reads that as a sign that you’re still angry. So you go back and dig up the anger again. You didn’t see the anger stop. It’s because of this that the mind can fool itself in lots of ways and come up with unskillful intentions and run with them. And you, who are supposedly in charge, don’t even know what’s going on, because part of the mind likes to hide what it’s doing from other parts of the mind. We’re here to open up those walls, open up the curtains, open up the windows, open up whatever it is that they put over themselves, so you can see what’s going on. You get more in control. So to see things arising, see things passing away in a way that allows you to gain some control over them, you’ve got to be still. Not only that, if you just have a sense that everything’s just coming and going, coming and going, there’s nothing solid anywhere, the mind gets pretty desperate. And it can have lots of weird physical symptoms, weird psychological symptoms that come up when you feel like the ground has been cut out from beneath your feet. But that’s not what we’re after. We’re after a mind that’s really solid and stable. And when it lets go, it gets even more grounded. You have a sense of really strong foundation. So try to get to know your breath from the inside, get to know your body from the inside, your mind from the inside. We spend so much time learning about the world outside, how it’s observed, how it’s observed by cameras, how it’s observed by things outside looking at us, other people looking at us, that we tend to lose touch with how we feel from within. Sometimes we feel like we don’t even belong in our own skin. Everybody else has laid claim to the world, and they seem to be laying claim to us. But here’s our opportunity to fight back, to reclaim at least this much inside. It may not seem like much, but a lot can be done here when you learn to read the body from within, read the mind from within. You’ve got everything you need to put an end to suffering. That’s what the Buddha said. That’s what all his noble disciples have said. One of the suttas of the Buddha says, “The entire world lies within this body.” The origination of the world, the cessation of the world, the path to the cessation of the world, they’re all here in this body. In this way, your inner sense of how you know the mind from within, how you know the body from within, they actually are your sense of the world outside. So switch that context around like that. Instead of feeling like a little small person oppressed by the world, you’re larger than your perception of the world inside. That way nothing can push you out of where you are. So claim this space as your own. Move in, learn how to deal with the different energy flows in the body. If you’re the kind of person who has been repressing a lot of emotions, you may find a lot of difficult energies coming up. If there’s a sense of too much pressure in your chest, think of it dissipating out your arms and out the palms of your hands. Too much pressure in your head, think of all the blood vessels in the neck, both the front of the neck and the back of the neck, opening up and that pressure just going down. In other words, learn to take charge in here. Learn how to adjust things so this is a good place to stay. It’s this much is yours and it’s enough to find true well-being, to find true happiness. Just don’t let any strange ideas push you out.

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