Keep It Simple

August 24, 2020

It’s always good when you meditate not to get too far from the basics. You can sometimes get involved in the subtleties of the breath energy in the body and start feeling like you have too much to follow, too much to keep track of. At a time like that, it’s good just to go back to the really basic steps. Think about those seven steps that Ajahn Lee laid out. Tell yourself you’re going to take one of the steps and do it really well. For instance, you could explore long breathing and try the four varieties. Long in, long out. Long in, long out. Long in, short out. Short in, long out. Short in, short out. You can make that the theme for the entire hour. Ask yourself, “How do you know at what point to end the in-breath? How do you know at what point to end the out-breath?” What are the signs? If you can get to know that one issue really well, you will have developed a lot of important sensitivity. Because the length of the breath is one of the ways that you can give rise to rapture. But you can tell yourself for the time being you’re not even going to think about rapture. You’re just going to think about the one exercise. Or you can think about the different ways that Ajahn Lee talks about the breath energy going through the body. And at the base of the skull, down through the spine, out the legs. And just stay with that one current of breath for the whole hour. Or breathing in right at the heart and going down through the stomach and the intestines. See what one whole hour of that would do. If you know you have a physical ailment, you can try one way of breathing that you found has worked for that. It helps to relieve the tension around that part of the body. And give a whole hour just to that one thing. It’s when you get to know one thing really well that that kind of knowledge begins to seep through and penetrate to other issues as well. Because what you’ve done is you’ve developed patience, you’ve developed sensitivity, you’ve developed your powers of observation. And when you take that more observant, more sensitive mind and apply it to other things, you find that they all become clear, too. Our problem is that we’re juggling too many balls, trying to accomplish too many things all at once. And as a result, nothing gets done really well. So monotask. And if part of the mind complains, that the one task is getting dull, tell it. You’re not looking carefully enough. Because there’s a lot to see simply in the length of the breath, or simply to see in one way of moving the breath energy through the body. And there’s a lot to see just keeping the mind in one place. Because all too often what happens is we move from one state of becoming to another, even in the concentration. And then moving from one to another, there’s a little moment of blacking out. And all kinds of things can go on in that moment. What you want to do is develop an awareness that’s as continuous as possible. Because if you keep it with one thing, it’s bound to get more sensitive once it’s gotten over the initial boredom. And you realize that there’s more here than you suspected. So keep it simple. Keep focused on one thing. And if part of the mind complains, “I’ve been meditating for all these years. What am I doing going back to the basics?” Every wise craftsperson always makes the point of going back to the basics every now and then. You hear the story of famous tennis pros whose game is going to slump. And they finally realize, after many years of changing rackets, changing coaches, changing this or that approach, that they forgot the number one lesson, which is, keep your eye on the ball. Or keep your eye on the breath. Or whatever it is that chooses your basic exercise. Which hand are the parts of the body right now? And just go through. And you’re going to ask yourself, “Well, nothing seems to be happening. You’re not here to make the things happen, aside from just going through the repetitive exercise.” Don’t anticipate too much. Just see what happens to your mind as you go through and visualize all the different parts of the body you have. These parts of the body that you’ve been living with for who knows how long, ever since you’ve been born. You rarely give them any thought, except when you’re sick. But here’s a chance just to think about them. And as you allow yourself to think about them, over time you see that it will have an impact on the mind. Now, if you find the impact to be depressing, stop it, because that’s not the intention. Otherwise, just keep at it. Keep it simple, keep it basic. And that quality of truthfulness which you’re developing as you keep it simple and basic, sticking with one thing, that will open things up. It’s when you’re true that you see the truth. In the beginning, the truth doesn’t have to be a major thing. You make up your mind, you stick with one meditation object, and you stick with it, truly. That way you let the quality of truth show its power, the quality of consistency show its power. Because if you just flit around the various exercises associated with the breath, the mind doesn’t really change its habits. Its habits are to flit around anyhow. Here you make up your mind to stay with this one thing, and as you stick with that determination, you begin to see how it can really move mountains inside the mind.

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