

Thinking that Leads to Stillness

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Focus on your breath. Watch it all the way in, all the way out. Notice where you feel it. If it feels good, keep breathing the way you are. If it doesn't feel good, you can change.

Noticing and making adjustments in this way is called evaluation. It's a really important part of the meditation—which means that to get the mind still, you really do have to think. For it to settle down you have to give it reasons for wanting to settle down to begin with. Then you have to have skill in finding a good place for it to stay, where it's happy to stay for a long time. That's what the thinking is for.

The Buddha has right view, both mundane right view and transcendent right view, to remind you of why you're doing this. Why would anyone want to sit and watch his or her breath? Because some really important things can be learned right here, especially about why you're causing yourself suffering. Right view is there to help give you the motivation for why you're doing this.

So you have to think about that sometimes, because sometimes you're sitting here meditating and you start wondering, "Maybe I'd better think about x or think about y or tomorrow or yesterday or whatever." You have to be able to remind yourself, "No. There are good reasons for why you're staying here."

Then when you try to settle down, you also want to deal with the obstreperous members of the committee that are very picky about where they want to settle. The mind is really strange this way. It can go off and think about things that cause suffering for days and days and days on end, and it doesn't seem to want to stop. But if you tell it, "Why don't you stay here with the breath and be quiet for a while?" it says, "Well, that isn't comfortable. I don't like being here. I want to go someplace else."

So you've got to give it some candy. You've got to show it, "Okay, you stay here and it's going to be really nice." This is why you work with the breath and notice how the breathing feels, and then try to do what you can to spread that sense of ease once you've found it. Learn how to spread that to the different parts of the body so it gets more and more refreshing and gets really, really good. That way you have good reasons to stay and you have a good place to stay. The mind can really settle down. It's not that you have to do all this thinking all the time. Thinking is getting everything prepared and putting up the mold.

As Ajaan Fuang used to say, it's like casting something in concrete: As long as

the concrete isn't solid, you need a mold. You can't take the mold away until the concrete has set.

The same way with getting the mind to settle down: You have to think about why you're here, you have to think about how to do this well, and you have to think about any problems that come up. But once the mind settles down and things are clear, then you can drop the mold and just *be there* with the breath. This is the way thinking leads to stillness. It leads to the kind of understanding that allows you to put thinking aside, at least for the time being. So learn to get your thinking in order. That's an important step right there in getting the mind still.