

Training the Whole Mind

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When we train the mind, it's not just a question of using a meditation technique to bludgeon the mind into the present moment. If that's our approach, the mind is going to start rebelling, finding ways of slipping around our defenses, because there are times when the meditation technique is right for the situation and times when it isn't. The times when it isn't: That's when the mind is going to rebel if you single-mindedly use just that one technique and don't have other techniques or approaches up your sleeve as well.

Meditation is not just a question of technique. In training the mind, you have to remember there's a whole committee in there. In the past the committee has had its balance of power, its likes and dislikes, and the politics among the various voices in your mind. Each of them has different tricks for pushing its agenda on the rest. So just as these defilements have lots of tricks up their sleeves, you as a meditator need to have lots of tricks up your sleeve, too.

One really basic trick is for when the mind says, "I've got to do this. I want to do that. I don't want to meditate." You've got to ask, "Well why?" And play kind of dumb, so that the mind really has to explain itself. It's like lesson number one in any journalism class: If you really want to get a good interview out of people, you have to play dumb, ask stupid questions, so that they think they have to explain things to you very carefully. And oftentimes they reveal all kinds of things they wouldn't have otherwise.

It's the same with your own mind. When greed, anger, and delusion come into the mind, they usually barge in with a lot of force and expect to push you right over. So one thing you have to do is to ask, "Well, why? Why should we follow that? Why should we want instant gratification?" And there will be an "of course-ness" to their answer the first time around. "Of course you want it this way. Of course you want it that way." "Well why?" If you're persistent in being block-headed like this, all the defilements will start revealing themselves. You'll see how shabby they are. You'll be able to get around them more easily.

It's like training a little child. Sometimes you have to be strict with the child, other times you have to offer rewards, patiently explain things. Other times you have to make up little games. In other words, you have to use your full psychology with the mind. But this time around you're not using it for the purpose of deception, which is what the mind ordinarily does with itself. You're

using it for the purpose of truth and honesty, for what's really in your own best interest.

What does the wandering mind do for you? It gives a little bit of instant gratification and then that gratification goes, with nothing left to show for itself. If you keep allowing this to happen, where are you going to pick up the skills you'll really need when aging, illness, and death hit with full force? This is why the Buddha stressed the principle of heedfulness all the time. We can't just spend our time sniffing the flowers and looking at the sky. There's work to be done. When the mind is untrained, it causes us a lot of unhappiness. If the mind is well trained, if it's more tractable, it can bring a lot of happiness our way.

In order for that to happen, you have to learn how to psyche yourself into the mood to meditate. Once it starts meditating and begins to see the results, it gets more willing and tractable—most of the time. Then there are times it starts rebelling all over again, totally irrationally. So you've got to sit down with it again, work things through with it again, to see exactly what issue got covered up the last time around and is only now getting exposed.

This is one of the ways in which you learn a lot about your defilements. It's not that you have to wait for a totally solid concentration before you can see the defilements clearly. A lot of learning about the defilements lies in learning how to struggle with them as you bring the mind to stillness. You begin to see: "Oh, this is how greed works, this is how aversion works, this is how I've fallen for this stuff before in the past. Well, this time around I'm not going to fall."

Sometimes it's like a battle. Other times it's more a question of learning how to work together in a way that's for your own best interests: how to be a mediator, a negotiator, or a patient teacher. You've got to have lots of ways of relating to the different elements in your mind. The times when you can win the defilements over to your side: That's when it's best. Your desire turns into a desire to practice. Your hatred turns into a hatred of the defilements. You learn how to use the energy of these things for your own true benefit.

That's when you can be said to be a discerning mediator. You can't gain insight simply by following the rules. Somebody says, "For insight you need to do one, two, three, four, five, six, and seven. So you do one, two, three, four, five, six, seven without any thinking, without any reflection on what you're doing, and yet that doesn't give you any true insights. It gives you pre-programmed insights sometimes, but the actual startling new understandings that can come through the meditation don't happen because you're too busy following the directions.

The directions are there for you to apply to the mind and then to observe, to look at what happens, to reflect on what happens, to make adjustments. Make the meditation your own and not just somebody else's bulldozer running

through your head. After all, the big issue is how you relate to yourself, how you relate to the body, how you relate to feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. That's the area where you're causing yourself suffering, so that's the area where you've got to gain sensitivity and insight. Nobody else can get into your head and straighten these things out for you. You use the techniques of meditation to see what they reveal about the mind. Then you build on those lessons so that the meditation becomes your own.

In Thai, they have a word for practice—*patibat*—which also means looking after someone, to attend to someone's needs. In the practice of the Dhamma you're looking after your own mind, attending to your own mind's needs. It's not so much that you're learning about Buddhism. You're learning about your own mind, looking after your own mind. That's when the meditation really starts showing its value. It rearranges all the power balances in the mind so that truth begins to take over, wisdom begins to take over, discernment begins to take charge. These become the big powers in your mind, the ones in charge of any discussion.

When that's the kind of mind you have, it's a really good mind to live in. We live in physical places only for a certain amount of time but in our own minds all the time. Try to make the mind a good place to live so that, no matter what else happens outside, at least the mind is on proper terms with itself, not fighting itself, not doing stupid things that aren't in its own best interest. Get so that it really does know how to deal with the aggregates as they arise, how to deal with pain so it doesn't turn it into suffering, how to deal with pleasure so it doesn't turn it into suffering. Get so that the mind develops a basic intelligence in sorting itself out, managing itself, so that all your mental powers suddenly become powers you can truly put to good use.

As we were saying today, there are times when, for your own good, you don't want to be focused on the breath. There are things you have to think about, things you've got to plan for, things you have to ponder, where you take all the powers of the mind you've trained in concentration and put them to other uses. That way the benefits of the concentration permeate your whole life, everything you do.

So it's an all-around training, not just learning to relate to the breath, but learning how to relate to everything else going on in the mind as well, so that skillful thoughts take over and unskillful thoughts get left behind. That's when you can say that the meditation is a whole-mind process. That's when it gives results penetrating throughout your whole life. The committee members learn how to live together. The unskillful ones get outvoted. The ones who should be in charge, the skillful qualities, take over and run the show in such a way that nobody suffers.