

Attahi Attano Natho

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The nature of the mind is that he likes to feed on things. It feeds on pleasures from outside, on the support we get from other people. But it can also feed on its own inner qualities—if you develop them. If there's nothing much there, there's not much to feed on. And if there's nothing much inside to feed on, then you go out trying to feed on other people, feed on pleasures of various sorts outside. If you leave yourself hungry inside, you're in a bad position. You have to depend on whatever you can find outside.

This is one the reasons why we meditate, to develop good qualities inside that the mind can feed on, so that it can be independent. If it's still in a position where it has to feed on to some extent on outside, at least put it in a position where it can choose.

So, what have you got inside? There doesn't seem to be much to begin with. You've got the body sitting here breathing, and you've got the mind thinking and aware. But when you put those things together, they can grow. The more you're aware of the breath, the more you explore the breath, then the more you see find that the breath has lot more to offer than just keeping the body alive. The way you breathe can have an effect on your health, and it can have an effect on your mental state. Even when the mind is bouncing around but the breath is calm, after a while it has calming effect on the mind. The mind can begin to settle down.

You can see it work the other way as well. You get upset and angry about something, and all those hormones start roaring through your bloodstream. Your heart beats, the breath changes. And even though the initial impetus that got you angry has gone, and the actual anger is out of the mind, you see the symptoms in the body that convince you that the mind must still be angry because of all this activity going on in the body. That can aggravate the anger, bring it up again and again and again and again.

We're trying to take that principle and turn it around. One, remind yourself that even though there may be physical manifestations, say, of fear or anger or sorrow whatever, they don't necessarily mean that at that moment you've got that same emotion in the mind, that same thought in the mind. If you can consciously calm those manifestations, it has a calming effect on the mind.

So try to breathe in a way that's comfortable: easy coming in, easy going out, not strained or tightened or stressed. Think of the whole body being nourished by the breath, with everybody getting a part, because the breath is not just the air

coming in and of the lungs, it's the energy flow throughout the body. So think of it spreading through whole body, all the way out to every pore of the skin, breathing in, breathing out, as you begin to develop this resource inside.

Just the fact you've got this breath energy in the body can be used for good or for not so good, so try to learn how to use it to good effect. Give the mind something good to feed on inside. Just this sense of ease in the breathing makes it a lot easier to function throughout the day. Instead of having to run around hoping to get praise from this person or patted on the back by that person or emotional support from somebody else, you can just breathe in, breathe out. It feels good inside. You carry this sense of well-being around so that you're not out there constantly trying to suck in whenever is out there, hoping that you can feed on it.

At the same time, you're developing good qualities of mind: mindfulness, the ability to keep something in mind continually; alertness, the ability to watch what's actually going on; persistence, the ability to stick with something. These qualities, as you develop them, can provide food for the mind from within the mind. When disturbing thoughts come into the mind or disturbing things happen outside, if you're mindful and alert, you can keep reminding yourself: There's no need to get upset here. Getting upset here, getting riled up or whatever by the events outside, is not going to accomplish anything. You don't have to get riled. If you keep reminding yourself of this, it'll change your sense of the possibilities before you.

In this way, this ability to keep something very firmly in mind becomes a kind of food for the mind, nourishment for the mind. And it's a protection, because otherwise you go jumping on and feeding on whatever is out there, and of course when you start feeding on things outside that are not good, it's going to have a bad effect on the mind. If you feed on things that are toxic, it'll start toxifying mind.

So you have both the breath here as a provider of a sense of well-being, a kind of nourishment, and you've got the thoughts in the mind, these mental strengths that you can feed on. In this way, you become more and more independent. You become your own mainstay. There's a saying in the Buddha's teachings: *Attabhi attano natho*, the self is its own mainstay. But it can be your mainstay only if you develop the resources you've got inside.

So that's what we're doing here. We're developing an internal food source. It gets even better when the mind really settles down and can develop a state of concentration, because concentration brings with it a sense of pleasure, even a sense of rapture, as you can stay with one thing that feels really good.

Traditionally, they talk about concentration as being food for the meditator because it provides that sense of ease inside, a sense of fullness inside. When you have a sense of fullness inside, you're not hungering after things outside. That puts you in a position where you really can be your own mainstay.

Some people might argue, "What's this about the self being its own mainstay? What happened to the teaching on not-self?" When making yourself your mainstay, you learn to be very selective about what to identify with. You can identify with skillful thoughts. You don't have to identify with unskillful ones. You can identify with skillful tendencies. You don't have to identify with unskillful ones. You're learning that you can be selective about what you identify with.

That's where the not-self teaching comes in. You realize: "This is something I don't have to claim as being me or being mine." You realize that it's a useful strategy for happiness. That's what your sense of self is, too. It's a strategy for happiness. Some of the strategies are useful; some of them are not. Sometimes they may have been useful in the past but they've outlived their usefulness. If you have the idea of your self being one singular thing, you're going to be in trouble because everything coming up in that singular thing will have to be you or yours, and you're stuck with it whether you like it or not, whether it's helpful or not. But if you take the attitude that your sense of self is a series of strategies, you can figure out: What's a useful strategy right now? What are not useful strategies right now? You can be more selective.

As the training progresses, you get a greater and greater sense of what's a useful strategy and a more refined sense of exactly what's a good outcome from your actions, from these strategies, so that the things you have to depend on at one level of practice can be let go on another one. The reason we tend to balk at the idea of not-self is, given that our sense of self is a series of strategies, we feel like we're being deprived of our strategies for happiness. But what the Buddha is actually doing is saying that there are these other strategies as well. Learning not to identify with certain things can also be a strategy for happiness.

So the Buddha is actually expanding your range. The wider your range, the more you can really be independent. Because it's important to have this ability to choose what is the right course of action at any one particular time. That really is food for the mind. It enables you to be more and more independent. Because even when there are good things outside, good people outside to depend on, you can't always depend on things staying that way. As the chant said just now, "I will grow different, separate from all that is dear and appealing to me." This happens to everybody. With the things we like, the people we like, the ones we've learned

how to depend on, there's going to be separation—even people who provide healthy nourishment for us.

So we've got to learn how to be independent, to have our own internal food source, so that we don't get sucked into situations where we have to depend on people who are harmful for us, and so that even when there are good people around us, we learn how not to depend on them totally for our happiness. We have a full range of strategies for dealing with any situation so that we really can be our own mainstay.

That's what we're doing here as we meditate: developing a wider range of resources, a better range of food inside. As long as the mind needs to feed, it can feed on something really good and healthy. It can have a safe food source, one that you can always depend on. When you've got these internal resources developed, it changes your relationship to the world outside. You can look at situations, you can look at relationships, without that sense of hunger, without that sense of need. That changes the dynamic radically.

So keep working at this task of developing your inner resources: working with the breath, developing it into a resource, exercising your powers of mindfulness and alertness so that they can become your resources as well. You'll find that they can take you a lot further than you might think.