

Fabrication Theory

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Sit with your back straight, facing forward, your eyes closed. That's called getting your body in position. The next step is getting your mind in position. Focus your attention on the breath. Know when the breath is coming in; know when it's going out. You can focus on the sensation of breathing in any part of the body where it's easy to follow. It might be the tip of the nose, at the rise and fall of the chest, the expansion and contraction in the abdomen, anyplace where the sensations in the body tell you now the breath is coming in, now the breath is going out. That's getting the mind into position.

The next step is getting it to *stay* in position. That's going to take some work, because the mind has a tendency to wander. That's like a hobo, hopping trains, going from one train to another train to another train, and who knows where he's going to end up. Very rarely can you trace back how you got from one thought to one very different thought.

So to fight that tendency, keep with the breath. Try to make the breath as comfortable as you can. Try to notice when the in-breath is getting too long or when it's too short. How about the out-breath? Is that too long or is it too short? How do you know? You watch for a while and you experiment. You might think to yourself, "long breathing" for a while, see how that feels. And then "shorter breathing," see how that feels. Then adjust it till you get it just right: not too long, not too short, not too deep, not too shallow, not too heavy, not too light. Find the rhythm and texture of breathing that feels best right now.

What you're exploring here is the basic energy that keeps the body alive, so it only stands to reason: If you want the body be healthy and the mind to be comfortable, it makes sense that the breath should be comfortable as well. If the breath feels tight and constricted, it's not going to be good for the body, and the mind certainly isn't going to want to stay. It's going to want to wander off somewhere else.

So try to find a way of making the present moment a comfortable place to be, a pleasant place to be. At the same time, give the mind something to do. You're not a just chaining it down to the breath. You explore it to see how the breath feels. This makes it easier to stay. If the mind wanders off—and you can expect that it'll wander off: If it wanders off, just bring it right back. If it wanders off again, bring it back again. You're training it in the same way that you'd train a puppy. It's going to take a while, because puppies don't have that many deceptive tendencies.

They're pretty easy to read, pretty easy to train. The human mind has lots of tricks. So it's going to take a while to get around its various tricks: wandering off thinking about something else, coming back for a little while, just to please you for a bit, and then goes off again someplace else. You missed it again, so you keep bringing it back. Try to make the breath as comfortable as possible and see what ways you can change the breathing to make it more interesting.

Even though you're focusing on the breath, you're actually training the mind, training it to be more mindful: in other words, more able to keep one topic in mind continually. And more alert, noticing what you're doing, along with the results of what you're doing. But what makes all the difference is ardency, which is the attempt to do it skillfully, in a way that actually gets results. That requires patience and determination.

It also requires the desire to do it. You have to see that this is something important. As the Buddha once said, the sign of a wise person is knowing that the mind needs to be trained. If you're going to find any happiness in life, the mind needs to have some training. Otherwise, you can get all kinds of material wealth, friends, family, and other things outside that are really nice, but if your mind isn't trained, you can destroy all that external happiness. You can find ways of making yourself miserable no matter how well off you are outside. By the same token, there are lots of people who are very poor, don't have much, but they really are happy inside. That's because their minds have been trained.

So remind yourself that this is what's going to make all the difference between happiness and misery in your life: whether your mind is trained or not. If you find yourself wandering, remind yourself that this is important work you're doing here, getting your mind under control.

Another quality that's required to make this a skill is persistence. You stick with it again and again and again, because it's the continuity of your effort that's going to make the difference. You could focus on the breath for a few seconds and then wander off to something else and focus on it for a few more seconds and then wander off again, but it won't make much difference. The difference comes from sticking with the breath as long as you can. No matter how compelling your thoughts may be, you're going to stay with the breath. Remind yourself that even though there is a thought going through the mind, it doesn't destroy your breath. The breath is still here. So the thought hasn't pushed you off the breath. You've gone running after the thought.

As soon as you catch yourself doing this, go back to the breath. It's always there. It's much more forgiving than most friends would be. If you've got a friend but you're abandoning the friend again and again, the friend eventually will have

no more interest in you. But the breath is always there. So you come back to it, come back to it, again and again and again. Try to stay with it continually.

You'll begin to notice the steps by which the mind develops a stirring of a thought. In the beginning, it's just a slight stirring. It's hard to say whether it's physical or mental. It stirs a little bit and then you look into it, and say, "What could this be?" It seems to resemble something, so you slap a label on it, "Oh, this is a thought about x ."

The next question is, do you want to go with the thought about x ? And for most of us, we haven't even posed the question, we're already running—or at least we're not aware we posed the question. It's there. The mind acts very quickly. If you're not still enough, you can't see these steps. But if you're persistent, you begin to notice the point where the mind is beginning to lean in the direction of going someplace else, even before it's left the breath—like an inchworm at the edge of a leaf. It extends his body out a little bit to see: Where is the next leaf? When it finds it, pop, it's there, it's gone.

So the more carefully you watch the mind, the more you begin to see these steps and have more control over them. You don't have to go running with the thought.

This requires a third quality, which is intentness. You really focus on what you're doing. Simply staying with the breath, going through the motions, is not going to cut the cake. You've got to give it your full attention. After all, these are the motions of the mind that determine not only what you're going to think but also what you're going to say, what you're going to do. If you can't watch the motions of your mind and see what they're doing, they're going to fool you into doing and saying all kinds of things you later are going to regret. So you have to watch them carefully.

The fourth quality is your ability to analyze what's going on. You see that you're in a thought, or that a particular thought is really insistent. Look at it the same way you'd look at a movie you don't like. You're stuck there in the movie theater. There is one way of getting through it, though, which is to analyze it: How did the director do this? How did the actors do this? Why is this a bad film? Where did they make mistakes? Or if you're watching a horror movie that's getting too much, remind myself, those actors are not really dying, they're pretending. Can you catch them as they are pretending?

Analyze what the mind does as it goes with the thought or has itself entangled in the thought, so that you begin to see these thoughts are just like little shadows, the same way a movie is just images thrown up on a screen. It's our mind that stitches those images into a coherent story and makes something out of them, so

that you forget it's just light on the screen. You begin to identify with the characters, you begin to sympathize with them as if there really were human beings up there that you're watching.

But if you can step back a bit and say, "This is just film imagery. There are all kinds of deceptions they create to make it feel realistic, to feel compelling, that make you want to go in." If you can step back and look at their tricks, you don't get sucked in.

What this means is that if you're going to train the mind, you have to train the mind not to identify with its thinking. Give it a place like the breath where it can establish itself as its main focal point. And from that focal point, you can watch the movements of the mind, so that you can choose which movements you want to go with, which ones you don't.

That puts you more in control. When anger comes up, you don't have to go running with the anger. When greed comes up, when lust comes up, when fear comes up, pride comes up, you don't have to go running with these things, because you know where they're going to take you. They're going to take you to places where you're going to do and say things that you're later going to regret.

It's like running round with bad friends. They take you downtown and they get you to go steal from a store and then they run off, and you're left with the stolen goods in your hands. The police catch you. Where are your friends? They've gone.

The same with these thoughts: When they lead you to do or say something and then you've said and done it and you're the one who has to face the consequences, the thoughts are not there anymore.

So if you want to find any genuine happiness in life, you've got to get the mind trained, put it in a position where it can stand back from its thoughts and learn all the tricks of their trade. It's like learning film theory. You step back from a film and analyze it so that you don't get sucked into the story. In the same way, this is thought theory, fabrication theory, where you learn how the mind fabricates things. When you've mastered that, you've mastered the ways of the mind.

That's when you're really in charge. After all, the biggest danger in life is a mind out of control. And who does it harm? Well, the first person it harms is the particular person whose mind it is.

If your mind is out of control, it's like giving your car over to a crazy person. You give him the keys and say, "Go wherever you want." Well, the crazy person is going to drive it who knows where, run into people, crash the car, because you have no control. But if you learn how to gain control over the mind, so that you can gauge its thoughts and choose clearly where it wants to go, where it doesn't

want to go, you're driving the car yourself. You can take it where you want to go safely.

So bring these qualities to the breath. The first set is mindfulness, alertness, and ardency in the practice. Then there are the bases of success: the desire to do it well, persistence, intentness, and learning how to analyze things, and in particular to analyze the motions of your own mind. These are the qualities that bring success in the training of the mind.

So get the body in position. Get the mind in position. Then use these qualities to keep it position so that you can get the most use out of it. That'll change the whole balance of power inside.