

## *The Need for Evaluation*

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When you focus on the breath, when you try to bring the mind to a state of concentration, you're trying to do two things at once. One is to give the mind a place where it can rest, gather its strength, heal its wounds, and in general develop a sense of ease and well-being. The second purpose is to be able to watch the mind, to see what's going on in the body, to see what's going on in the mind, so that you can understand how you're giving rise to suffering and how you can put an end to it.

So we're here both for well-being and for knowledge. And it's good to keep this double purpose in mind, because sometimes we come to meditation and all we want to do is rest. We don't realize we're also here to do some work. As Ajaan Lee says, there's concentration work: directed thought and evaluation, the factors in the first jhāna. They're a necessary part of the meditation, both for the sake of well-being and for the sake of knowledge.

We can't ignore them. We can't slough over them or skip over them, because this is where a lot of our insight into the mind and into the body can come. Sometimes you hear of directed thought and evaluation simply as a kind of wobbling of the mind as it's trying to steady itself, an unfortunate weakness in the mind that you want to overcome. But that's missing the whole point. They're a necessary part of the meditation. As Ajaan Lee points out, what we're doing here is learning to focus on the breath and getting to know the breath, evaluating the breath so that we can give rise to a sense of pleasure and, taking that sense of pleasure, seeing how we can spread it throughout the body. It's obvious that this is going to help with the sense of well-being we're trying to develop in concentration, but it's also very important in getting to know what's going on in the concentration. And it involves a certain amount of work.

When you look at the analogies for the different levels of jhana, the analogy for the first jhāna, the bathman mixing water in with the power, is the only analogy where you've got a conscious agent at work, making a conscious effort. The other analogies are of the water filling the lake, or of lotuses being saturated with water, or of a person just sitting there covered with cloth. In none of them is any conscious effort involved. There's no evaluation involved. But here, in order to get the pleasure to go through the body, you've got to evaluate: Exactly what's blocking the pleasure from going through the rest of the body? And what exactly

constitutes pleasure? You've got to learn how to evaluate the breath. You take that judging faculty of the mind and you learn how to use it skillfully. You learn how to test your ideas. You might think, "Maybe long breathing would be good tonight, or maybe short breathing." Well test the breath. See what results you get. Learn how to evaluate your actions.

It's only through trial and error like this over time that you begin to get a sense of when you can trust your powers of perception and your various ideas about what's going on in the body. Can you push the pleasure through the body? Try it, see what happens. How about going through the body and finding where there's tension and relaxing that? See what happens then. How about using different perceptions about the breath—how it comes in, how it goes out—noticing where some perceptions create unnecessary tension, whereas others can dissolve the tension immediately.

In other words, you're using the active faculty of the mind and learning how to develop skill with it. At the same time, you're getting a sense of how the physical elements in the body work together. What exactly is the breath of the body? What's the fire element? What's the earth element? What's the water element? How can you manipulate them in ways that allow for pleasure to flow through the body? You can also read your experience in terms of the five aggregates: The different elements here are the aggregate of form. And when you get that feeling of pleasure, are they the same thing or they are something separate? Then there's the perception, the different labels you apply to the breath, to your sense of the body, your mental image of the body. Learn how to use these things deliberately.

The fabrication here is the directed thought and evaluation. That's a very necessary part of fabrication going on in the body. And then there's the consciousness. To get that pleasure to develop through the breathing and then to be able to spread it through the body, you've got to see the body and your mind as aggregates. Get a sense of: Where's the perception, the label that's running things here? How do you fabricate ideas? How do you test them to see what works and what doesn't work; which ideas are useful, which ones are not?

In this way, you get to develop insight as you're getting in the mind to settle down. You're familiarizing yourself with how the mind creates this inner world here. Now, it *is* a form of becoming. You've got the desire to give rise to concentration, and you've got the aggregates, which are your field. The desires are the water. Your consciousness is the seed. It's all right here. And in the process of evaluating how you're getting the mind to settle down, how you can maximize the pleasure, you're getting to know the field, you're getting to know the moisture, you're getting to know the seed—all the necessary elements that go into creating

this inner world. These are the same elements that will create your sense of the world around you, and the sense of the next world that you go after you pass away. It's all right here. In the process of evaluation, you're getting to know them.

So don't try to skip over the step of evaluating and say, "I'll just stay with one spot and hope it'll turn into something stronger and better." You're missing an important step in the concentration practice, the step that combines insight with the concentration and can maximize the pleasure. This is a way of serving both purposes in the concentration, creating a larger sense of well-being throughout the body, so that pleasure saturates the body, a sense of fullness, refreshment, lightness, these can saturate the body as well.

With the body saturated like that, it's a lot easier to stay here. At the same time, in learning how to work with this feeling, work with these perceptions, you're getting a hands-on sense of what the Buddha is talking about when he talks about aggregates. As you get more skillful in consciously directing your perceptions, then when the Buddha tells you to apply the perceptions, say, of inconstancy, stress, not self, you can apply them with more precision. You understand what they're for. They're for the purpose of lessening the burdens of the mind. They're for the purpose of getting you to pull back and watch what you're doing more carefully, to see where it's causing unnecessary suffering. So you're developing a lot of the skills and knowledge you'll need to go beyond the concentration, and go to actual release.

So don't try to skip over this step as a nuisance. It's absolutely essential to what you're doing here. You need to evaluate. Without that process of evaluation, no discernment is going to arise.