

Many I's, Many Eyes

October 13, 2009

Focus your attention on the breath. Take a couple good long deep in-and-out breaths and see how it feels. Notice how the breath is flowing and see where you find the sensation of breathing easiest to follow. We're not focusing just on the movement of the air in and out of the nose. We're also focusing on the sensation of the energy flowing through the body, as you breathe in, as you breathe out, and that's something you can focus on anywhere, anywhere in the body at all, anywhere where you have a good clear sensation that tells you now the breath is coming in, now the breath is going out.

Try to bring two qualities to work here. One is mindfulness, i.e., reminding yourself to stay here. You're here to watch the breath, you're not here to think about the day's events, you're not here to plan about tomorrow's events. You're here to be in the present moment, and the breath is the best place to anchor yourself in the present moment. As long as you're with the breath, you know you're right here in the present.

So keep reminding yourself to stay here.

The other quality is alertness, which means actually watching what you're doing, knowing when you're breathing in, knowing when you're breathing out. Also notice when the breath is comfortable, when it's not, and at the same time notice whether your mind is here or it's suddenly taken a mind of its own and gone off someplace else.

If you catch the fact that it's gone off, your mindfulness will tell you, "Just come right back to the breath." Be as sensitive as possible to how it feels. Reward yourself for coming back by giving yourself one really good comfortable breath, one that's really special, that feels gratifying to all the little cells in the body that need breath energy. Then, when you're giving yourself one special breath, what keeps you from giving yourself a second one, and a third? Keep on rewarding yourself for staying here this way. But don't get so complacent as to think, "Well, everything is very nice. I'm going to really stay this time." Because, oops, there it goes again. So you bring it back again. Don't get discouraged. Every time it the mind wanders off, bring it right back.

As the breath gets more and more easeful and comfortable, you can think of that sense of ease spreading through the body. As you breathe in, the whole body feels at ease breathing in; as you breathe out, the whole body feels at ease breathing out. Try not to squeeze the breath energy out as you breathe out. Allow

things to feel full as you're breathing in, and even to maintain that sense of fullness as you breathe out, so that the breath energy and the mind become more solidly together, more steady.

You'll notice here that you're actually watching two things. One, you're watching the breath, and two, you're watching the mind. This is an important part of the meditation. It's useful while you're meditating to think of the mind as a committee. There's not just one person there. There are lots of different people, and you want to bring them all together to work on the breath. At the same time, keep in mind when you wander off that you're not going to be surprised. Otherwise, you might tell yourself, "Hey, I'm here to meditate on breath. What happened to me?" It's good to remember that in a committee there are many I's, and depending on how you spell the I, that can be a problem or it can be part of the solution to the problem.

If you spell the I with the capital I, you've got lots of different opinions, lots of different ideas about what you want to do here, because some of the I's just want to have a good time. Here it is, a whole hour with no responsibilities: "Hey, let's go out and travel." Other I's will say, "Hey, I've got all these responsibilities I've got to take care of tomorrow when I go to work. I've got to think about them. Here is a good time to do it." So there are lots of different possibilities of what you could be thinking about right now. You've got to get the I who has made the decision to stay with the breath and put that I in charge.

This is where the other way of spelling I comes in useful. You can think of lots of different eyes, spelled e-y-e, to keep watch on your work. The more of these eyes you have working with you, the more quickly you'll be able to see when the mind has slipped off and, if it has slipped off, how you can drop that thought even if it's in mid-sentence or mid-word. Just bring it right back. Then keep watch again. This way, you have a system of checks and balances, where you have lots of different people inside you cooperating.

This is one of the reasons why we want to have a nice easy sense of breathing, a comfortable full sense of breathing, because the more the different identities in your mind are satisfied—pleased with the results of your breathing, the results of your meditation—the more of them will want to cooperate, to help keep it going. The more robust your meditation will be.

It's like those computer systems that have lots of redundancies. A failure with circuit doesn't bring the whole thing down, because you've got alternative circuits that can keep everything going.

So think of the mind as having lots of different identities, and they're all helping to keep check on one another, to watch over one another. I read that

when Ajaan Chah first sent his Western monks over to England, he wanted to make sure they had a full sangha of four monks. As he said, that way they'd be embarrassed to do anything wrong, because somebody else would be watching them all the time. In other words, they were watching one another. In the same way, when you have the different parts of your mind watching one another, they all help you progress in the path.

There are some people who would say that you have one self and it's a bad self, and because it's a bad self, there's nothing you can do to pull itself up. You need an outside power to come in. But if you realize you have lots of selves in here, lots of different identities corresponding to all the different desires you've had—some of them skillful, some of them not—then if you get the skillful ones in charge, they can help one another along, keep check on one another, offer advice. You can begin to notice: This works; this doesn't work. This way, having lots of committee members actually becomes an aid to your meditation rather than an obstacle.

And you develop some really important qualities. You start out simply with alertness combined with mindfulness, reminding yourself what you came here for—which is to stay with the breath, keep the mind right here—and then you actually watch to see what's happening. Then you combine these with a quality called ardency, which means that whatever you do, you try to do it skillfully. In other words, when you bring the mind back to the breath, bring it back skillfully. As you stay with the breath, try to be skillful in your breathing, so that it feels good. Be skillful in evaluating the breath, so that it gets more and more satisfying. Be skillful in learning how to spread that sense of ease, well-being, and fullness through the body, so that you're not pushing it too hard, you're not forcing things, but you're allowing things to seep through the body, in a way that feels really good. And be skillful in maintaining that sense of fullness.

As these qualities work together, they turn into a factor of right concentration: evaluation. You have standards against which you want to measure things, and your standards get better and better with practice. This in turn develops into a quality of wisdom called analysis of qualities, seeing what you're doing, seeing the results of what you're doing, and getting clearer and clearer on what's skillful and what's not.

So it's important to remember these qualities. You've got to keep watch on what you're doing and have as many eyes in your mind watching what's going. Each eye has an added different perspective, seeing from the front, from the back, from either of the sides, from above and below. After all, if you really want to see anything clearly, you've got to see it from all sides. This is why movies are able to deceive us so much, because there's one camera, there's one lens, and you're

looking at things from one side. That's why they can build movie sets that don't have to be complete: just the front of the building, just the facade. As you watch the movie, it looks like the real thing. But if you had a whole series of cameras looking at things from all directions, you'd see behind the facades that they have nothing but 2x4s propping them up, and there's nothing really there. That would destroy the illusion. The same with the mind: It's useful to have yourself looking from all sides to help destroy its illusions about itself, to see things you wouldn't otherwise see.

I was talking this evening about an incident that Ajaan Fuang remembered from his childhood. He lived in the town of Chantaburi, which had a lot of gem mines, and the French really wanted it. So they were looking for any excuse to take over the province. It so happened one time that a Frenchman with a plantation was murdered. The French moved their warships into the harbor and told the Thai government, "If you don't find the murderer, we're going to take over this place." If the police had gone out, wearing their police uniforms, they never would've been able to catch the murderer. So what the King did was to send out some spies—spies dressed as laborers, spies dressed as poor people on the side of the street. They started talking with other poor people, other laborers. And it turns out that those were the people who knew. They were able to catch the murderer, and the French had to back down.

So sometimes it's good to look at things from below, sometimes it's good to look at things from above, and from either side. If you have lots of different eyes in the mind, it actually strengthens your meditation.

This is how discernment works. One part of the mind is acting and other parts of the mind are watching, so that you're very clear about what's being done, why it was done, and what it leads to.

So even though having a committee may be difficult in the beginning because they're all pulling in different directions, if you learn how to gather them around the breath, and the breath feels really good, really attractive, so that you can immediately see the results, so that you're not just going on the strength of conviction or the strength of desire, but you're actually seeing results and they look good from many different perspectives: That's how you're going to get the committee to work together so that your meditation can progress step by step, as your insight becomes a more all-around insight. That's one of the meanings of the word *pañña*, or discernment: all-around knowing.

So keep watch right here. Keep everybody watching right here, and your meditation is sure to get better and better.