

Boring

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The voice that says, “This is boring”: Why do we believe it so easily?

Lots of other voices come into the mind and you can watch them and not get involved, listen to them and not get involved. But the one that says, “This is boring,” seems to sneak right into you, and you identify with it immediately.

So it's important that you learn not to do that and to be on your guard. Otherwise it takes over. You sit for a while watching the breath and a voice in the mind says, “This is boring, nothing's happening,” and you can go off and think about things you've thought about who-knows-how-many times and yet not find it boring.

You can think about food. How many flavors are there in food? Not that many, really. Sexual fantasies: Whatever your favorite fantasy may be, there are not that many variations in those fantasies. And yet we go over them again and again and again and not find them boring.

Then there's aging, illness, and death. By now we should be really bored with them. Yet we keep coming back for more.

But then when you sit down with the breath—which is your path away from this boring suffering that we've been going through all along—you very quickly get bored with that.

There are basically two reasons for this. One is that you're not paying careful enough attention. There was an ajaan in the forest tradition who once complained to Ajaan Lee, saying, “What is there that you can see, where are you going to get any discernment, out of watching the breath? All there is is in, out, that's all. What kind of discernment can you get from that?”

Ajaan Lee replied, “Well, if that's all you see then that's all there is.”

In other words, the problem is not with the breath, it's with the attitude you bring to it. After all, where did the Buddha find awakening? Right here at the breath. And his breath wasn't any different from ours. What was different was the attitude of interest and attention that he brought to it—because, of course, he wasn't watching just the breath. He was watching the mind in relationship to the breath, seeing a lot of subtle movements going on in the mind.

Those are the really interesting things. And everything you need to know for awakening is right here. It's just that your powers of observation are not subtle enough. And if you can't even see the subtleties of the breath, there's no way you're going to see the subtleties of the mind.

So start questioning your attitude toward the breath. What's going on when you breathe in? What's going on when you breathe out? How does the in-and-out breath relate to the other breath energies in the body? There's a lot to explore here.

If you find that there are pains in different parts of the body, this is an excellent time to see how the breath relates to pain. What kind of breathing aggravates the pain? What kind of breathing helps to alleviate the pain? What ways of *perceiving* the breath either aggravate or

alleviate the pain?

Or if you find that there's a sense of ease, you can play with that. Can you spread it around? Can you spread it out to every pore? Can you keep it going? How long can you keep it going?

If, when you've kept it going for a while, the mind says, "Well, okay, enough of that," you have to say, "Why? Why is that enough? If it were really enough you'd be awakened. But you haven't gained that yet. So try doing something new with the breath."

There's nothing you're going to learn by just doing the same things over and over and over again without trying any variations, without asking any questions. This is the important part about the meditation, this is where insight comes from: asking the right questions.

Just as with science, new revolutions in science come from asking new questions, the kinds of questions that people prior to that time would just dismiss.

For example, all the questions people started asking that led to chaos theory, the things that people used to ignore: a dripping faucet, for example. Is there a pattern in the drips of a faucet? Most people just dismissed the question, nobody ever learned anything from it. And then there were group of physics students who decided to ask, "Well, what if we made a graph?" They started observing the dripping faucet and they began to see interesting patterns. Those patterns led to some important discoveries in chaos theory.

So there are things going on all around you and inside you that you're not paying attention to. And as a result, you don't learn from them. So when you find yourself feeling bored, ask yourself, "Is there some way I could pay closer attention? Is there something going on here that I'm not curious about or not learning how to question, taking too much for granted?"

Because that's a lot of what the problems in the meditation are: things that you just take for granted. They've "got to be that way." Well, do they really have to be that way?

If your normal pattern is that you're sitting here for an hour and it takes a good thirty minutes for the mind to gradually drift down, well, why? You know where you have to go, you know what you've got to do. Why does it require this long, gradual drift? Can't you get right to the point at the very beginning and see how long you can stay there?

Part of the problem is that you've made up a narrative about how the meditation has to go. And whether it's a good or bad narrative, you're comfortable with it. But it's a pretty boring narrative.

So once you've found your spot, remember that. The next time you sit down, go right there—don't waste any time—and see what happens around there. If you're afraid that you won't know what to do with all that extra time of stillness, ask yourself why you're afraid. When you probe into the matter, you'll learn some interesting things.

So that's the first thing you want to look for when you find that you're listening to that voice that says, "This is boring," and you're getting ready to believe it. It's usually a sign that you're not paying very careful attention.

Fabrications are going on. Perceptions are going on. All the aggregates are going on right

here, and you're relating to them in your old ways. And as we all know, the old ways are the ones that cause you to suffer. There's ignorance there.

There's something you're not looking into, some question you're not asking. So try to cast around and see what that question might be—the question that will allow for some new ways of doing things as you stay here with the breath coming in, the breath going out.

If you need some added motivation to stay here, you can drop the breath for a little while and go to the other recollections: the recollection of the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha. Recollection of death—the fact that it could happen at any time. Whatever recollection you find gets you more motivated: Think about it for a while until you're ready to come back to the breath.

And remind yourself: Everything you're going to need is right here, simply that you haven't noticed it yet.

As Ajaan Lee says, it's like walking back and forth on a path. A path that you follow often is the one you start to get to know really intimately. If you pay attention, you'll notice subtle differences in the path that you would have missed if you had followed the path only once or twice. Otherwise, if you don't pay attention, if you just go on automatic pilot, you're never going to see anything, no matter how many times you walk the path.

But the advantage of staying with the breath is that there are also the movements of intention right here in the present moment and those are the things you've really got to watch out for. That's the karma in the meditation.

All of the other factors that you need to understand: They're right here for you to observe again and again and again. If you let yourself get bored with them, you're never going to see their subtleties. You just tell yourself, "Okay, I've seen this before. I know this." Remind yourself, if you really knew these things, you'd be an arahant. You'd be free from suffering. So there's still something you don't know. That's one way of dealing with boredom.

The other type of boredom is the one that comes over you when something is about to appear in the mind and you don't want to look at it. You're about to uncover something important, but there's a part of the mind that wants to keep it hidden, so it puts you to sleep.

This is why the Buddha has you deal with drowsiness, and not give in to it right away. Test it. Probe it. Challenge it. Change the way you breathe. Visualize a light right in front of you. Rub your limbs. If you have to get up and walk around for a while, do some walking meditation. See if that wakes you up.

But don't give in to that old habit that says, "Well, if there's drowsiness I might as well go to sleep right now; I must really need it," or "If I'm drowsy, this meditation is not going to go well, I'd better stop." Sometimes something's about to come up but the mind is hiding it from itself. So hold that thought in mind, "I don't want to be afraid of whatever comes up, whatever the unattractive defilement might be. If I don't let myself see it, I'm never going to be able to get past it."

The problem is that part of you is identifying with that defilement. All too often, we identify with all the wrong parts of the mind. This is why you identify with the boredom that's hiding something that's causing you to suffer. So you've got to remember: The things that you hold onto are causing you to suffer. However much you may like them, however much mileage you may get out of making them part of your internal narrative, you've got to remind yourself: If you ever want to get past the problem of suffering, you've got to be able to look at things, look at whatever comes up in the mind.

So if there's a sense of drowsiness that comes with the boredom, take it as a warning sign: Something is being avoided in the mind.

So those are the two primary things to look for when that voice comes up, "This is boring." You have to ask, "Really? Well, let's stick with something that's boring for a while." We've spent most of our lives running away from what's boring, complaining about what's boring. Look at it carefully. Is it really boring? If it's part of the path, there's something interesting going on here that you're missing.

What's really boring is the way that we keep giving into our old defilements again and again and again, and suffering again and again and again. You've got to ask yourself, "At what point will you have had enough?" Nobody else can ask that question for you. So you've got to ask it of yourself.