

WYSIWYG

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One of the forest ajaans who was a contemporary of Ajaan Lee didn't see why Ajaan Lee was teaching breath meditation. As he said to Ajaan Lee, "What is there to see? What is there to get any discernment from? It's just in, out, in, out." And as Ajaan Lee replied, "If that's all you see, then that's all there is." In other words, what you're looking for and the type of interest you take in the breath are going to make all the difference. Remember that the breath is a kind of fabrication, and we're here to learn about how the mind fabricates its experience. So this is a prime example. It's the most blatant of the various fabrications.

Verbal fabrication is subtler; mental fabrication, subtler still. Breath is right here, coming in and going out. And if you pay attention, you begin to realize that it reflects your mind state with a lot of sensitivity. At the same time, as you can learn how to control the breath, you see it has an effect on the mind state. The two are very closely associated, very closely connected. This is where you can get a handle on your mind, on how to shape it in the right direction.

There are some meditation techniques where they say, "Don't get involved in any fabrication at all. Just note, note, note what's coming up or scan through what's coming up, but without changing anything." But that just drives the process of fabrication underground. When you don't admit to yourself that there's an intention in the way you breathe, you're covering up a huge part of your mind right there. There are so many intentions lurking around in the mind that shape what we're doing, shape what we're thinking. And we are responsible for them, even though we may only be vaguely aware of them.

There's a passage where the Buddha says that the fabrications in the mind have a karmic impact whether you do them of your own accord or because someone else tells you to. And this applies to your other karma, physical and verbal, as well. He also says that these things have karmic consequences regardless of whether you're alert to your intentions or not.

So you're not let off the hook if you're not alert or if you're doing simply what other people are telling you to do. It's still your responsibility. So you want to see this clearly. We're not here just to watch impersonal events. We have to first realize how much we're responsible for these events.

When you look at the breath in line with the Buddha's instructions on breath meditation, you start out by focusing mainly on the breath and on the process of bodily fabrication. But then the instructions themselves are a kind of verbal

fabrication. You're thinking about what you should do and tell yourself how to do it. Then you evaluate what should be done next. And then there's mental fabrication: the perceptions that you bring to the breath and the feelings that result. You've got all three processes of fabrication right here.

In particular, perception is very important, because the way you perceive things is going to have an impact on how you experience them. In other words, the labels you apply will help highlight some things and cast other things into the darkness. It's like going down a highway. If you go down during the day, you've got the sun illuminating things, so you see some things and not others. But at night, when you have your headlights on, you see some things that you didn't see during the day, but other things you did see during the day are going to be blocked out. In the same way, your perception has an impact on what gets highlighted and what gets thrown into the background, thrown into the darkness. So you've got to play with these perceptions for a while. See which perceptions of the breath are helpful and which ones are not helpful for getting the mind to settle down. It's in this way that the meditation leads to insights into the mind.

That's another criticism you sometimes hear directed to breath meditation: the people who say, "When you die, the breath's going to go, so you'll be abandoned by your meditation object." Well, if you were only learning about the breath, that might be a valid criticism. But the fact is, as you're learning about the breath, you're learning about the mind. In particular, you're learning about how the mind shapes and fabricates things. And that's a set of insights that are going to be really useful as death comes.

As we were saying this afternoon, the Buddha's not interested in asking the question of what it is that gets reborn. His question is, "How does rebirth happen?" It happens through these processes of fabrication in the mind. So if you get some hands-on experience here, it'll serve you well as the mind begins to fabricate a new state of becoming as you realize that you can't stay in this state of becoming anymore.

So you're learning a lot of important things. There's a lot to see here if you learn how to look. This is one of the reasons why the Buddha, in giving his instructions, gives you questions to ask. Look at the instructions on breath meditation, the sixteen steps: There's a lot more to breath meditation than is contained in those sixteen steps. The steps are meant to get you started by asking questions. The Buddha says, "Breathe in sensitive to rapture. Breathe out sensitive to rapture." Well, how do you become sensitive to rapture? Where are you going to find it? You have to look at the breath. You notice where in the sensation of breathing there is a sense of fullness, a sense of refreshment, because that's the

other meaning of the word we translate as rapture, *piti*. How does the breath feel refreshing? And when it feels refreshing, then the next step is: How do you let that sense of refreshment spread throughout the body? How do you maintain that? The Buddha doesn't say, which means that you have to find out on your own.

So you bring questions to the breath. You bring questions to your meditation. And that's how you see. In that way, you can turn almost anything into a topic of meditation. The breath is useful because it's always there and it's very close to the mind. All that's needed is that you take an interest in it. When you take an interest, you'll find that it's interesting. Here it is, the force of life, the glue that holds your body and the mind together. And here's your chance to get to know it well.