

## *All Eye*

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When the Buddha defines concentration, or samadhi, he defines it as *cittassa ekaggata*. Sometimes that term is translated as one-pointedness of mind. *Eka-* would be one, and the *agga* is often thought to be point, but *agga* doesn't mean point. It means the summit of something, like the ridge on a roof or the summit of a mountain. It also means a gathering place, which seems to be the translation that's closest to what the Buddha's trying to get at here. There's a gathering place for the uposatha, there's a gathering place for meals—all those are *aggas*.

In the case of concentration, you gather your mind around one object. The reason we say it's not one-pointed is because when you look at the analogies that the Buddha gives for the mind in concentration, they're all expansive: a lake filled with cool water; lotuses drenched with cool water, from their roots to their tips; a person entirely surrounded by white cloth.

That last one is the image for the most solid of the jhanas, the fourth jhana. That's where we're headed. We want to be in a position where we feel surrounded by our object, as when you're with the breath.

We talk about watching the breath, and it gives the impression that you have an eye in the mind and it's looking at something outside of the eye—its focal point is outside. Try to imagine instead that the eye is being focused inside the eye itself, and it's aware all around. That's the kind of quality of awareness that we're trying to develop.

It's like when people go into the forest to track animals or to look for mushrooms. They have to develop what's called scatter vision—where you're fully present in the present moment, and you're aware of your whole range of vision. That takes a lot of concentration. Any thoughts coming up that would pull you away from that expanded state have to be dropped. You're not at any one point in space, but you are at one point in time. You're right here, fully in the present moment. That's where we're headed.

Think, too, of the description of the Buddha as an All-around Eye.

Back in those days, they had the belief that devas were eyes all around—they could see with their whole bodies. This image of the Buddha has that same connotation. He sees all around. After all, if you're going to be looking at your defilements, you have to see all around. If you're focused on one spot, your defilements have plenty of places to hide away. It's like a being on a

stage where there's one spotlight: There can be all kinds of characters in the dark.

So, that's the quality we're heading for: fully present and expanded. But in the beginning, the mind has this tendency—a tendency it's picked up from long experience—of being focused on one spot. So you give it one spot, but from that spot, you survey the whole body.

The third step in breath meditation, as the Buddha says, is to breathe in and out sensitive to the entire body. And a good way to build up to that whole-body awareness and whole-body sensitivity is to go through the body section by section first, because there are a lot of parts of the body that tend to be hidden, kept in the dark, and if you really want your awareness to be all around, you've got to cast light on those dark spots, too.

You can think of the chakras to begin with. Ajaan Lee mentions the chakras beginning with the one right above the navel and then on up. He doesn't mention any of the lower chakras, which might've been considered impolite in Thai society. But any spot in the body where there seems to be a center of energy, focus your attention there. Think of the breath radiating from that spot. If there are any obstructions to its spreading out to fill the whole body, think of those obstructions dissolving away.

Then move up to the next center of energy, and then the next, and then you can go through the body in other spots as well, to the right, to the left. Sometimes it's good to compare the left and the right side, like your left shoulder and your right shoulder. Do they feel the same? Does one seem to be holding more tension or tightness than the other side? If so, can you relax it? Think of the blood flowing in there, dissolving away the tension. You want to get the reflex that wherever you focus your attention, any tension in the body relaxes right there.

This counters our usual tendency, which is that when you're focused on one spot in the body, you tend to tense up around it. You want to think just the opposite. Wherever you're focused, things are wide open—free, with a sense of energy radiating from the spot where you're focused.

And again, think of the image of the eye focused inside the eye itself, or a camera lens focused inside the camera lens. As you go through the body, hitting the major spots, then try to find the minor spots—the little spots, say, between fingers, between the toes, inside your elbow, inside your shoulders, all the little muscles in the head. Make a survey so that you're really familiar with how things feel everywhere in the body.

In modern society, we tend to be really disembodied, especially as all of our attention gets drawn into screens: video games, e-mails, YouTube videos. Our attention gets cast outside,

outside, and the body becomes unknown territory, like those old maps where they just had the outlines of the continents, and then in the interior of the continents were huge blank spaces where they wrote across, “Here be tigers.” Well, there will be tigers inside your body if you don’t get to know the body really well, because there will be places for your defilements to hide out. Wherever there’s a lack of awareness, mental states can hide out as well, so try to make your awareness more all-encompassing.

When you’ve done your survey of the different parts of the body, think of one spot in the body as being your center, and your awareness radiating out from that spot in all directions: the all-around eye looking in all directions, aware in all directions, clear in all directions. That image of the man surrounded by a white cloth—some people actually have a sense of a white light that develops as the mind gets centered. Other people don’t have white light, but they do have a sense of everything being really clear.

You want to maintain the sense of everything being of equal weight, as in the Buddha’s passage where he says, “What’s above is like what’s below; what’s below is like what’s above.” There are many ways you can interpret that passage, but one of them is that everything gets equal attention, as best as you can muster.

Think of every cell in the body breathing in, breathing out, and they’re all breathing in unison. Every little cell is aware—it’s a little eye. All the eyes gather together so that everything is clear. When your awareness is spread out like this, enlarged like this, then it’s less likely to go wandering off to the past or future.

It’s when your awareness is small that it can travel around. It pulls out of the present moment, and goes here, goes there. But if you fully inhabit the body, you have to be fully present, and it’s hard to go to the past or the future as long as your awareness is enlarged like this. And you’ll find that as your awareness gets more centered and all-around like this, it’s harder and harder to think, but for the time being, you don’t have to think. You want to get used to being fully present with this sensation of the body as you feel it all around, as you sense it all around.

In the Canon, they tend to mix up the senses. They talk about seeing with your body. Think of the body as an eye, and it sees all around itself. In that way, you develop the quality of concentration that really is strengthening. It pulls you out of a lot of your usual ways of thinking and gives you a really good place to rest, to be solid and strong.

So hold these images in mind—the eye focused inside itself, the all-around eye, the body wrapped in a white cloth. They give you an idea where you’re headed in the concentration, and

what kind of concentration it is. It doesn't bear down hard on any one spot. Wherever it's focused—and there will be one spot in the body that tends to get a little bit more attention than the rest—make that spot wide open.

Wherever you focus your attention, you scatter any tension that seems to be developing there, and then learn to stay right here. There'll be thoughts in the back of the mind, saying, "This is stupid. Nothing's happening." Well, nothing has to happen for the time being. It's good to get the mind used to being in this state, so that when it leaves this state, it can see things clearly as the mind begins to start thinking about things again. You can see why it picks up a particular topic and you can ask yourself, "Do you really want to go there?" You have this other alternative.

That's what's so good about the Buddha's teachings. They give us other alternatives to our normal ways of thinking. They pull us outside of ourselves, because our normal ways of thinking tend to focus on becoming.

In other words, you have a particular desire, and there's a world in your imagination that contains the desired object. Then you go into that world, take on a role there, and inhabit it—and you can get stuck in some pretty weird worlds. But the Buddha's giving you this alternative where you can get out, refresh your senses, refresh your mind, and you begin to see that the other worlds that you used to inhabit are really strange. You wonder, "Why would you want to inhabit them?" This is one of the ways that you can pull yourself out of some pretty unhealthy mind states.

So try to work on the skill of developing this alternative, where—instead of being focused on what your thoughts are—you're focused on fully inhabiting the body, with your awareness spreading in all directions. Front and back, top and bottom are all equal, and everything is clear all around.