

## *Breath by Breath*

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As you meditate, you have to be alert to two things: what you're doing and the results of what you're doing. Like right now, you're focusing on the breath. And what results are you getting? In the beginning, it may not seem like much. But the important point is that you're patient. There are a lot of things in this world that grow gradually, and one of them is peace of mind. If you're impatient, it gets right in the way of your peace of mind. Now, this doesn't mean that you should be lazy or lackadaisical in the meditation, it simply means that you should keep at it, keep at it, keep at it. As Ajaan Fuang once said: Meditation is a little thing that becomes big because you do it continuously. Just keep the mind with the breath.

Try to make the focus of the mind just right—in other words, not too heavy, not too light. If it's too heavy, it's like holding a chick in your hand and squeezing it so hard that it dies. If it's too light, you're holding the chick so loosely that it flies away. So try to figure out exactly how much pressure you have to put on the breath in order to keep your awareness there. One of the reasons we talk about allowing any pleasant sensations coming from the breath to spread through the body is that if you hold them in a very tight area, after a while even the pleasure gets unpleasant. It gets heavy, constricted, confined.

So think of your awareness as being like a radiant light. It's focused on one spot in the body, but everything spreads away from that one spot. And, for the time being, you don't have to go tracing out every little light beam that comes out of your awareness. You don't have to go running after it to see how far it goes. Just remind yourself that you're right here, and your awareness is radiating out of right here. Just try to make the point of "right here" as comfortable and radiating as possible, and leave it at that.

All too often we want the mind to get quickly to this or that stage, but the more we try to push it, the worse it gets. There's the story they tell of the foolish, inexperienced cow who has grass and water on the hillside. But she sees grass and water on another hillside and she wonders: "What is that grass like? What's that water like? Let's go check it out." But because she's foolish and inexperienced, she doesn't know how to get from this hillside to over to the next. She gets down into the ravine in between and then she gets stuck there. She can't get back to the place she originally was, much less to the other hillside.

So the trick here is to stay where you are. And if anything's going to develop, it's going to develop here, on its own. You can't map out the way the practice is

going to go. After all, all of your preconceived notions about the practice come out of ignorance. You simply have to do the causes, and the effects will happen on their own. When the causes are properly done, then the effects will come, there's no doubt about that. The problem is our impatience. We want things to come fast, especially if they've come fast in the past. We want them to come fast again. But remember, we're here to learn about causality, and one of the ways you learn about causality is simply to put in the causal factors, and see what comes out as a result. And if what you're learning is that the mind needs some time to calm down, you're learning an important lesson.

Just make sure that you keep at the breath and try to get on good terms with the breath. Don't regard the meditation object as your enemy or something to be conquered. Think of it as something you want to live comfortably with. You want to be friends. So keep chipping away, chipping away, chipping away, making adjustments here and there, so that the present moment is pleasant. It may not be rapturous, there may not be any bells or whistles or lights flashing, but maybe it's saving its bells and whistles and flashing lights for later on. Because the thing about pleasure is that if you allow it to stay just pleasant enough, after a while it begins to grow and grow and grow. Not because you pushed it, but because you've given it space.

Notice that the mind tends to be in one of two modes, either the producing mode or the consuming mode. The consuming mode is the really demanding one. It wants pleasure *right now*. And the producer tends to be a little bit lazy, so it likes to put in a little effort and then switch over as quickly as possible to the consuming. But as you meditate you've got to learn how to stick with the producer. Do a quick check every now and then to make sure that things are at least pleasant. The pleasure may not be overwhelming, but at least it will feel okay. That's to make sure that the producer isn't going overboard. Otherwise, just stay with the producing continuously. The continuity is what's going to make all the difference.

It's like planting a seed. If you give it five minutes of sunlight and just a little bit of water and otherwise abandon it, it won't grow. The sunlight and the water have to be regular. They have to keep coming back, and back, and back. Or you can say that it's like putting cream on a rash. You don't put the cream on and then wipe it off right away. You put it on and then you leave it there. It's the cream interacting with the skin over time that's going to cure the rash.

So keep the mind with the breath continuously, and then let them do their work. The mind does its work on the breath, and the breath does its work on the mind. And bit, by bit, by bit, the sense of ease, the sense of pleasure, grows. But

even when it gets large and intense, you can't abandon that producing mode. The ease will nourish the body on its own, without your having to turn into a lazy consumer. Just think of it spreading, spreading, but you're here, producing, producing, producing, so that you don't run out.

That's how the meditation will begin to make a difference in the mind.