

Engaging the Whole Mind

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When you meditate, you have to pay attention to two things. One is *where* you're going to focus your attention, and here we focus on the breath. When the breath comes in, know that it's coming in. When it goes out, know it's going out. Focus wherever you have a sense of the process of breathing. It may not necessarily be the movement of air coming in and out of the nose. It may be the movement of the chest, the movement of the abdomen, or just the general sense of energy flow in the body. Wherever you have a clear sensation that now you're breathing in and now you're breathing out, focus right there. Any thoughts that don't have any relationship to this you can simply let go. Just be with the sensation of breathing in and of itself. That's *where* you focus your attention.

The second issue you have to pay attention to is *how* you focus your attention: the qualities of mind you bring to this. Actually there are lots of qualities. If you had to think about all of them, it might clutter up the meditation. But it's good to keep a few of them in mind.

One list of the qualities is called the bases for success, qualities that help you succeed at the meditation. And there are four.

The first is desire: simply wanting to do it, having a motivation, having a sense that this is a good use of your time, and there's something you want to learn from the meditation, something you want to gain from meditation. Sometimes you're told you shouldn't come to the meditation with a gaining idea. But if you don't have a sense of what you're going to get out of it, you're not going to want to do it. After all, it takes effort. At the very least, you should realize that this is a way of developing a good strong reliable sense of happiness of the mind, a sense of well-being that doesn't have to depend on anything outside. That's something worth pursuing. If your happiness depends on things outside, it's going to fall down every time the wind blows. Every time the wind changes direction, there it goes, and you have to jerry-rig some other way of trying to find happiness—and then *that* gets blown over. So here when you come to meditate, you're looking for something that's solid, something independent of outside conditions and ultimately even independent of the thoughts going through your mind.

Once you have the desire to do this, the next step is persistence. To be persistent, you have to apply mindfulness and alertness as well. In other words, you have to keep what you're doing here in mind, keep the breath in mind, and be alert to how the breath is going, and alert to the mind when it wanders off.

Persistence means that you stick with it continually. It's not something you do for a while and then let your thoughts wander off and sniff the flowers here, look at the birds there, do a little window shopping over there. As soon as you sense the mind wandering off the breath, you bring it right back.

This ties in with the third quality, which is called the intentness. You really give all your attention to what you're doing. In this world of multitasking, this is not something you want to just add to your list of multitasks. We're monotasking here: just this one thing, the breath. The more you pay full attention to it, the more you're going to see.

This is why an important part of instructions is that once you get a sense of the breath coming and going out, you try to be aware of the whole body as you breathe in, the whole body as you breathe out. That helps to engage all of your awareness, 360 degrees, all-around. Whenever there's a sensation of comfortable breathing, allow it to fill the body.

So you've got desire, you've got persistence, and you've got intentness. The fourth quality is discrimination, in the good sense of the word. In other words, you look at the results of what you're doing in a discriminating way, and if things don't seem to be going right, you try to figure out what's not working. The discrimination here involves ingenuity as well. Maybe the breath is too long; maybe it's too short, too light, too heavy. You can make changes, experiment, to see what works. You're taking responsibility for the results. It's not simply a mechanical process that you put the mind through, where you do the steps, without any observing on your part, and somehow the mind will come out awakened. This is not a meat grinder. It's not an assembly line. It's a skill. And as with all skills, it requires that you have a sense of what works and what doesn't, trying to figure out—if it's not working—what you can do to make it go better. In other words, for discernment to arise, you have to engage all the powers of the mind.

So it's not just a matter of technique. The technique is there to give you something to work with. And in the course of working with it, you're going to have to engage the whole mind. As you're engaging the whole mind, that's when you get to *know* the whole mind. You have to take responsibility for what's happening. There's a quality of integrity underlying all of this. The mind doesn't settle down? Well, you have to figure out what you're doing, what you're doing wrong, and be cheerful enough to admit when you've done wrong. A lot of people don't like the idea of right and wrong. Sometimes they come to the Dhamma, thinking, well, you can get beyond right and wrong just by willing yourself to transcend them. But you can't get beyond them that way. You get beyond right

and wrong by figuring out what's right and what's wrong, dropping what's wrong, working with what's right until it's completed the job. Then you can let go of that, too. Until you've completed the job, though, you have to be very much concerned with what's right and wrong, what's skillful and what's not.

That requires a great deal of honesty on your part. So when you're giving your mind to the quality of intentness, that honesty is something you have to bring as well. You honestly look at what's going on. Then you honestly do your best to figure out how to make it go better. Try to get the mind to settle down more skillfully, more quickly, more solidly. It's all there in the seven steps that Ajaan Lee set out. It's simply a matter of mastering the steps with more and more finesse. In other words, you focus the mind on the breath and you bring the whole mind to bear on what's happening, particularly the issue of what you're doing that's causing stress, what can you do to stop causing that stress. When you give all your attention to that question, things are bound to develop. Your meditation is bound to succeed.