

Analyzing Results

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There are times when you meditate that if you try to analyze things too much, you mess yourself up. It's like being a millipede. If you stop to analyze what you're doing with each of your legs, you tend to trip over them. So if you focus simply on doing what you've got to do, without being worried too much about how the results are going, have some confidence that simply staying with the breath, resisting the temptation to go wandering off, will eventually bring the mind to peace. It may not seem peaceful in the beginning, but if you stick with it long enough, your determination will see you through.

But there are other times when you do have to analyze what you're doing. In other words, try the meditation and see what results you get. Try to see the connection between what you're doing and the results of what you're doing. In Pali this is called *dhamma-vicaya*, analysis of qualities. The qualities here specifically are skillful and unskillful qualities in the mind. To see what's skillful and what's not skillful in your mind, you have to notice what kind of results you get from fostering those qualities.

So it's good at the end of each meditation to notice how it went. When the mind was able to settle down, try to reflect back on what you did, and not just what you did when you meditated, but the mind you brought to the meditation, too. What did you eat today? What did you talk about today? What did you think about today? How did you try to maintain your mindfulness from one sitting meditation session to the next?

There's a tendency while we're sitting and meditating to really be observant. The watchmen or the supervisor is on the job. But then when you get up from the meditation, the supervisor goes on vacation. You don't want that. You want to have the ability to keep watch over the mind all the way through the day. As Ajaan Fuang used to say, make it *akāliko*, timeless. Or as Ajaan Mun would say, the practice should be a circle: A circle doesn't have any end, doesn't have a place where it stops. It just keeps going around the day, continually.

So what ways of riding herd on your mind got you flustered and irritated? What ways of riding herd on the mind actually helped keep it on a short leash, so that you don't have to unwind the long leash that tends to happen when you let it wander off. In other words, when it's on a long leash it's going to wind the leash around the bushes, around telephone poles, around trees, and you have to spend a lot of time untangling it when you sit down and try to meditate. But if you can

keep it on a short leash, it's right there. You sit down and *bang!* You're right here. And when you're right here, how do you maintain right here? Some thoughts may come up and nibble away at the edges of the mind, and it's almost as if the mind can brush them off, nothing much happens. But other thoughts eat right into the center of the mind, or the mind goes out to eat them. Then you're off someplace else.

So try to notice what's the difference between the thoughts. Is it in the difference in the content of the thought? Thoughts about certain topics really do dig into the mind more than others. Other times, it's more a matter of the strength of your mindfulness, the strengthen of your alertness. They've slipped a little bit and you've let your guard down.

Try to notice these things. The analysis here doesn't be very deep. We're not going to psychoanalysis—although sometimes over time you'll begin to notice larger patterns—but try to notice the specifics: What exactly happened, what exactly did you do right here, right now? Often it's in the specifics that you can see the patterns. If you jump too quickly, trying to see a general pattern, you miss some interesting details, the telling details that determined whether you were going to get snared by a thought or not.

For this to become a skill, you have to notice what works and what doesn't work, what ways of focusing the mind, what things you focus on, what levels of pressure you bring into the focus get results and which ones don't—and which ones get results at certain times and not at another times. Try to take note. Over time, you begin to see patterns emerging. You get a better sense of what works in what situations, and this is what makes the meditation a skill. But as I said at the beginning though, there are times when too much analysis just gets in the way, so you've got to put it aside and just do what you think is going to work at this particular point in time and place.

As the Buddha says, analysis of qualities is one of the factors for awakening that sometimes is called for, and other times it actually gets in the way. There are times when the mind is sluggish and needs a little analysis to gain some understanding, to gain some clarity, to wake up. When it's too active, though, the analysis just makes it even more overactive. So try get a sense of time and place for this element in your meditation.

The Buddha makes an analogy with fire: When a fire is dying out, you don't pour more dust on top of it, because that just puts it out totally. When it's dying out, you need to add more fuel. That's the analogy for analysis of qualities, in other words, when it's sluggish, you need to energize it. When the fire is burning at too high a rate, though, you don't want to add more fuel. That's the time you might

want to pour a little dust on it. In other words, just be still, still, still, as much as you can, focus on what you're doing, doing, doing, and don't spend a lot of time analyzing results. This way, you get a clearer and clearer sense of what exactly is skillful in the meditation. And the meditation does become more of a skill.

This is how you become more and more your own teacher, observing what's working and what's not, what needs to be done, what needs to be dropped, because no one else can peer into your mind to tell you. Even people who can read your mind can't necessarily tell what's going to work. They may have an idea, they may have an intuition, but the details of what works and what doesn't work: Those are things you have to determine for yourself.

And this is how you do it, through seeing cause and effect. Sometimes the causes and effects are simple little things: Eating a certain food may have an effect on the mind; talking about a certain topic may have an effect on the mind. So keep watch, be observant, in an all-around way. This is how the practice of concentration can lead to sharpening your discernment. The discernment and the concentration help each other along.