

## *Attached to Concentration*

*November 27, 2007*

Sometimes you hear in meditation instructions that concentration is okay as long as you don't get attached to it. That begs the question: How are you going to develop concentration unless you have some attachment, unless you enjoy it? There's a refrain in the Canon where the Buddha says that once you find an object you like, you take pleasure in it, find satisfaction in it, settle in it, and indulge in your object, the activity of the concentration. Which means that you've got to find it interesting, you've got to find it something you really enjoy. And to get good at it, you really have to be attached to it. You have to take delight in it.

This is why the way each person's mind is going to settle down is something very personal, very individual. In the forest tradition, you'll notice, there's no one technique that's supposed to work for everyone. There's no one-size-fits-all. Ajaan Mun himself would teach many different meditation techniques for the sake of concentration: the breath, contemplation of the body, repeating the word *buddho*, *dhammo*, or *sangho*. In fact, pretty much all 40 of the classic meditation techniques that are classified in the commentaries and can be found in the Canon are fair game.

On the top of that, the Canon and the commentaries tell of other ways in which people's mind can settle down. There's a story of a nun whose mind was just all over the place. Then one day she contemplated the fact that the people who work hard for their living are able to do it. "Here I am, with something easy like this, and I still can't do it." She felt ashamed. Didn't know what to do. She went back to her hut and, as she was washing her feet, she started watching the water as it flowed off her feet, down to the ground. That became the object of her meditation, calmed her mind down.

There's a story they tell of a monk who had trouble memorizing any kind of meditation word at all. The Buddha gave him a piece of cloth and told him just to run his hand over the piece of cloth again and again, and to watch it. As the monk rubbed the piece of cloth back and forth, the sweat on his hand got into the cloth. He began to notice that the more he rubbed it, the dirtier it got. Something in that just hit home with him. His mind was able to settle down.

So there's no one right way to meditate. And even though you see many meditation instructions, they're meant to be general guidelines, to point out possibilities, but you've got to explore on your own if you're going to find what captures your mind, what captures your imagination.

The word *citta* in Pali means “mind,” but it also seems to mean “interest” as well. In that sense, it’s one of the factors of any good state of concentration. There’s got to be interest in the object. If you simply tie the mind down to the object without giving it any sense of satisfaction, it’ll try to break loose. When it breaks loose, it’s not going to come back easily.

So even though you’re putting a tether on the mind, you’ve got to give it something to be interested in within the range of the tether so that it doesn’t mind staying in one place. It actually enjoys it.

For instance, with the breath: In his Method Two, Ajaan Lee gives a fairly detailed guidelines on where you can focus on the breath and the different ways the breath can flow in the body, but if you look in his Dhamma talks, you’ll see that he played with the breath in lots of other ways as well. He was always coming up with new ways of conceiving the breath. And Ajaan Fuang would talk about other ways of conceiving the breath, too. One was to imagine a line of energy running down the middle of your body, and the breath comes in and out of that line of energy. You try to keep that line of energy stoked. In other words, keep it full without squeezing it. Think of it being full all the time. Even when the breath is going out, that energy is still there, still glowing inside the body, alive from the head on down to the base of the spine.

You can try that and see if that perception of the breath helps. Or you can wander around your body and see which parts of the body need breath energy or seem to be tangled in one way or another. Try to work out the tangles.

There are a few general principles. One, you want to make sure that your feet and your hands are relaxed. That seems to improve the breath energy throughout the body. You’re opening up the exit channels to make sure that stagnant breath doesn’t build up. Keep things flowing all the way down to your feet, all the way down to your hands.

And check out the center core in the body every now and then. Make sure it’s okay. Make sure your posture is okay. Then from there, see what needs to be done, what captures your imagination, and follow your nose around the body to see what’s interesting. Is there a particular pain you’d like to work with right now? Or a sense of tension or tightness that you found maybe in your feet, or in your lower back, maybe in one of your hips, or your shoulder? In other words, instead of dutifully following what’s in the book, see what captures your imagination right now, what captures your interest right now.

It’s like learning how to play the guitar. You can buy a book that will teach you all the different chord progressions that are pretty basic, but there comes a time when you have to put the book aside and just explore what different chords you

can make with the guitar, what different sounds you can get out of it. Your guitar playing doesn't become your own until you've done that. Just play around, and a lot of times you'll find sounds that don't sound very good, but other times, you may run into something very unexpected that you like. The act of exploring in and of itself becomes enthralling.

You have to remember that the Buddha is talking about attachment and delight. He is not talking about simply liking an object. We can be more attached to certain activities than we are to particular objects. We like the desire. We like to learn new things. And it doesn't really matter so much what the object of the desire is or the new thing we've learned. The activity of desiring things, the activity of learning new things: That's what we're attached to.

So you learn how to use those attachments to your advantage. We all want pleasure and we're trying different ways all the time to find pleasure. Some we're attached to because at some point in the past we found pleasure in them, but that's no guarantee that we're going to keep on finding pleasure in them. But it's the activity of looking for the pleasure that we enjoy: finding something new, learning something new.

So explore, look around, see what captures your interest in your sense of the body right now. It doesn't have to follow the instructions in the books—and you don't have to be the good little boy or good little girl and not get attached to it. You've got to be attached. As Ajaan Fuang used to say, you've got to be crazy about the meditation, really liking it, always looking for opportunities to learn new things about the energy in the body, how your awareness relates to that energy.

In that way, the meditation becomes your own. You do it not because you're supposed to, but because you like to do it. As for the stage when you give up your attachment to it, it's like a child playing with dolls or with little toy trucks. You enjoy it and you get everything you can out of that little doll or that little toy truck, but there will come a time when you outgrow it. That's when you let it go because the activity of playing with it no longer enralls you.

It's the same with the meditation. There will come a point where you've had enough of playing around with the meditation and you want to look for something better. But you're not going to get to that point until you've played around pretty thoroughly.

So the statement you hear sometimes, "Well, I'm not attached to meditation. I tried it, and I'm no longer attached because I wasn't very good at": That's not the kind of letting go that the Buddha talked about. Throughout the practice it's a

matter of mastering a skill until you've explored the full range of possibilities that that skill can offer. That's when you let it go.

So there's a skill in exploring the present moment, seeing what enthralls the mind in the present moment. Sometimes you may find that a meditation word gets interesting, so stay with that. Or analyzing the different parts of the body, thinking about the breath energy, say, in your bones: There's lots to play with here in the present moment.

Follow your nose, see what captures your interest, and the mind will settle down and find something to take pleasure and satisfaction in, settling and indulging in. The concentration will be an enjoyment, not just a chore.