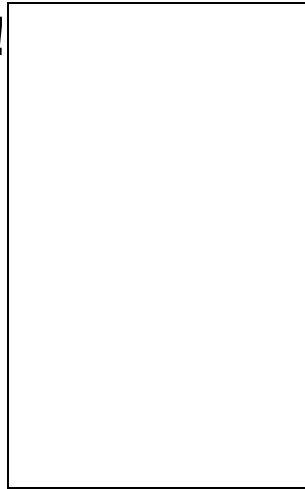


Start Doing It!



A lively talk, in Lao dialect, given to the Assembly of newly-ordained Monks at Wat Pah Pong on the day of entering the Rains Retreat, July 1978)¹

Breathe in... breathe out... just like that. Even if others are "standing on their heads"² that's their business. Don't bother your head over it. Just concentrate on breathing in and out, just know your breath, that's enough. Nothing else. Just know when the air comes in and goes out, or you can say to yourself; "BUD" on the in-breath, "DHO" on the out-breath.³ Take this as your subject of awareness. Just do it like that for now. When the air comes in, you know it; when it goes out, you know it. Then your mind will be peaceful, not disturbed, not restless. Just the air going in and out, continuously.

In the beginning, keep it this simple, nothing fancy. However long you may sit, if you're "sabai"⁴ or peaceful, you'll know within yourself. If you keep at it, the breath becomes refined and softer, the body becomes soft (relaxed), the mind becomes soft — that's worth having! Go ahead, let it happen naturally. Sitting "sabai," firm in meditation, not in a daze, not drowsy or nodding off, everything becomes effortless. Now you're peaceful! Then as you're getting up: "Wow, what was that?" You can't stop thinking of that peace.

Then we follow through by keeping constant clear mindfulness,⁵ knowing ourselves. Whatever we say, whatever we do, going here, going there, going on alms-round, washing our bowls or eating, we know what it is we are doing. We have mindfulness, staying steady. Just keep on doing it like this! Whatever it's time to do, do it with constant mindfulness.

And walking meditation: take a straight path between two trees, about seven or eight full armspans. Walking's the same as sitting Samadhi. Collect yourself, resolve that now you're going to get into this meditation and calm down your mind so that clear mindfulness will be strong enough to arise. As to methods, some will start by spreading Metta (loving-kindness) to all living creatures for protection. Go ahead, the chicken-hearted need various approaches!

Begin with your right foot first. Take a good step and walk, saying to yourself: "BUD-DHO, BUD-DHO..." with your footsteps. Keep your attention right there with your feet the whole time. If you feel restless, *stop* till peaceful, then step again. Knowing the beginning, middle and end of the path, and know when you're walking back. *Know* where you are continuously!

So that's the method. You can do walking meditation. Some people will say: "Walking back and forth like that is looney!" But there's a lot of wisdom in walking meditation, you know. Walk back and forth. If you're tired, stop. Turn your attention inwards and bring your mind to rest by calmly being aware of your breath.

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Then become aware of one more thing, your alternating postures. Standing, walking, sitting, lying down, we keep changing positions. We can't only stand, only sit, or only lie down! We live using all these postures, thus we must develop awareness in each and every position and make them useful.

Go ahead and do it! It's not easy. But, to put it simply: It's as if you take this glass and put it here for two minutes, then put it there for two minutes. Move it from here to there every two minutes. Just an example, but do it like this with concentration. In watching your breath it's the same; you do it until you doubt and suffer and that's when wisdom can arise. Some people will say: "What? Moving a glass back and forth like that is nutty, not useful! Are you crazy?" Never mind, just do it. And don't forget, two minutes not five minutes. Concentrate! It's all in the doing.

Same with watching your breath. Sit up balanced in the cross-legged posture, right leg resting on the left. Breathe in till it reaches here (abdomen), breathe out till all the air is out of your lungs. Breathe in until full then let it go. Now don't try to regulate it! However long or short it is it's okay, good enough. Sit and watch your breath go in and out naturally. Don't let it slip away. If it does, stop! Where has it gone? Find it and bring it back.

Sooner or later you'll meet up with something good. Just keep at it. Don't think you can't do it. Just like sowing rice in the earth, as if you're throwing it away, but soon a sprout is born, then it becomes a sheaf, and soon you husk it and can eat "khao mow" (green sweet rice). It's like that, you know. That's its nature.

This is the same — just sitting. Sometimes you think, "What am I sitting here looking at my breath for anyway? It'll go in and out by itself without me gawking at it!" That's just our opinionated mind, always flea-picking. Ignore it! Just try to do it till peaceful, because when calm, the breath becomes fine, body becomes relaxed, mind is relaxed, all's just right. Continuing on till perhaps you're just sitting there without your breath going in or out, but still alive. Don't be scared! Don't run away thinking you've stopped breathing! This is already a peaceful state. You don't have to do anything, just sit in it. Sometimes, it's like you're not even breathing, but you are. Many things like this can happen, but it's okay. Just be aware of it all, without being fooled by any of it.

Just keep doing it and *often!* Right after you eat, hang up your robe and just start walking: "BUD-DHO, BUD-DHO..." Keep at it till your path becomes a knee-deep trench, just keep walking. When tired, go and sit. Do a lot! Do it so that you *know*, so that you have it, so that it's born, so that you understand what it's all about. Not just walking a bit: chung, chok, chung, chok...thinking of this and that, then up to lie down in your hut, soon snoring away! You'll never see anything that way. If you're lazy, when will it ever be finished? If you're tired or lazy, how far will you get? Just get it together, work through and get beyond your laziness. Not saying: "Peaceful, peaceful, peaceful," then sit and aren't peaceful right away, then quit because it isn't there.

It's easy to say, but hard to do. Huh! Like saying: "Oh, it's not hard to plant rice, to plant and eat rice is better than this." But go out and do it and you don't know the oxen from the buffalo from the plow! Actually, doing it is a lot different from talking about it. That's how it is, you know.

All of you, wanting to find peacefulness — it's there! But you still don't know anything yet. Whoever you ask, you won't know. Just get to know your own breath going in and out, "BUD-DHO, BUD-DHO..." That's enough. Just do that. You don't have to think of much. At this time, know this, learn this for now. "I do it and I don't see anything." Doesn't matter, just do it. Whatever comes up, okay, just do it like this, so you'll know what it's about. Do it and see! If you just sit like this and know what's happening it's really all okay. When your mind becomes peaceful, it knows. You can sit all night till dawn and you won't feel you're even sitting, you enjoy it. You can't explain it, it's like enjoyment.

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When it gets like this, you might want to give "profound" sermons, but beware of getting "verbal diarrhea," expounding the Dhamma constantly, driving folks nutty with your non-stop teaching. Like old Novice Sang. One night just at dusk, walking meditation time, I heard someone in the bamboo grove nearby carrying on: "Yo, yo, yo, yo..." I sat and listened, thinking, "Who's teaching who over there? Who's carrying on?" He didn't stop, just kept babbling on. So I took my flashlight and walked over to see. Sure enough, it was Novice Sang sitting under his bamboo clump, lantern lit, cross-legged, bellowing at full blast, expounding the Dhamma to the night! "Sang, have you flipped your lid?" "Oh, I just can't hold it in!" he said. "When sitting, I gotta teach; when walking, I gotta teach...don't know where it'll end!" A real nut! Oh well, that's how it is, it can happen, you know.

But keep at it. Don't just follow your moods. When lazy, keep at it! When energetic, keep at it! Do the sitting and walking and even when lying down, watch your breath. Before sleeping, teach your mind: "I won't indulge in the pleasure of sleep." When you awaken, continue meditating. And when eating, we remind ourselves: "I won't eat this food with greed, but only as medicine to sustain my life for this day and night, in order to have strength enough to carry on meditating." Before sleeping we teach ourselves; before eating we teach ourselves like that continually. If standing, be aware; if sitting, be aware; if lying down, be aware. Everything, do it that way! When you lie down, lie on your right side, focusing on your breath, "BUD-DHO, BUD-DHO..." until you fall asleep. And as soon as you awaken, continue "BUD-DHO, BUD-DHO..." as if you hadn't skipped a breath! Then peacefulness will arise...be continuously mindful.

Don't look at another's practice, you can't do that. Regarding sitting meditation, sit balanced and erect. Don't have your head tilted back or hanging down. Keep it balanced. Like the Buddha statue — now he's "sitting tight" and bright! If you want to change posture, endure the pain to the utmost limit before changing. "What?" you say, "I can't handle that!" But wait before moving. Endure the pain to its limit, then take more. However much it hurts, go ahead and endure it. And if it's too painful to keep "BUD-DHO" in mind, then take the pain as your object of awareness: "Pain, pain, pain, PAIN!" on and on instead of "BUD-DHO." Stay with it till the pain reaches its end, and see what comes up. The Buddha said that pain arises by itself, and it'll stop by itself. Let it just die, don't give up! Maybe you'll break out in a sweat — drops as big as corn kernels rolling down your back. But if you can get past the feeling once, then you'll know what it's about. But that comes gradually, don't push yourself too far. Just slowly keep at it.

And know about eating...chew, swallow, and where does it end up? Food that's right or wrong for your body, you'll know it. Know where it reaches. Refine the art of eating; eat and estimate when you'll be full after five more mouthfuls, then stop! Take enough water and that's it. Try and see if you can do it. Most people don't do it like that. Instead, they eat till full, then top up with five more mouthfuls! But that's not the way, understand? The Buddha said just keep eating attentively and know you're not yet full, but you will be in five more mouthfuls, then stop! Take enough water till full. Then, whether walking or sitting, you'll not feel heavy and your meditation will become automatically better. But people don't want to do it like that. If you don't really want to train yourself, then you can't do it. Otherwise, you eat till you're too full, topping up with another five mouthfuls. That's how it is, the nature of our greed and defilements and the things the Buddha taught go in different direction. We have to watch ourselves.

And sleeping, being aware, it's up to your know-how. Sometimes you won't get to sleep on time; sleep early, sleep late, never mind. That's what I do. Get to sleep late or not late, doesn't matter, when I first awaken, I get right up. don't make a fuss over it. Cut it right there. If you awaken and are still sleepy, just get right up! Get up and go, wash your face and start walking meditation, go right ahead and walk. That's how we must train ourselves, do it!

So these are the things to do. But you won't know about them from just listening to what others tell you. You can only know from actually doing the practice. So go ahead and do it. These are the first steps in training the mind. When meditating, focus on only one thing. Sitting, the mind only watches the breath going in and out,

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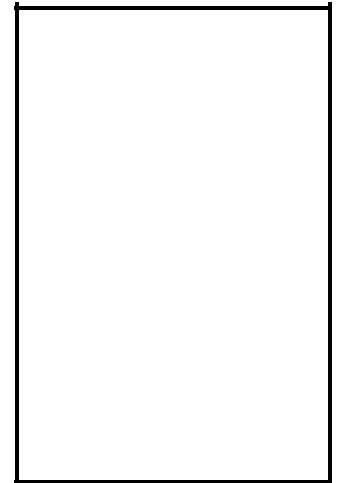
continually watching, slowly becoming peaceful. If the mind is scattered, as soon as you sit you're off missing home, mind reaching way over there, thinking you'd like to eat some noodles (those who've just ordained — hungry, no?). You want to eat, want to drink, hungry, wanting, missing everything! Till you're crazy. But if you go crazy then be crazy, till you can work through it.

But do it! Have you ever done walking meditation? How is it? "Mind wanders." Then stop till it comes back. If it really wanders, then don't breathe until you can't stand it — your mind will come back. If you sit and your mind goes running everywhere, hold your breath, don't let it out, and when you can't stand it, it'll come back! Make the mind strong. Training the mind is not the same as training animals, you know, it's something that's *really* difficult to train! Don't be easily discouraged. At times, holding your breath till your chest is about to burst is the only thing that'll catch your mind — it'll come running back! Try it and see.

During this rains retreat get to know what it's about. In the daytime, do it; at night, do it; whenever you're free, go ahead and do it. Do walking meditation night and day, even if you don't talk. Turn your attention right back to your meditation, make it continuous.

It's the same as the water in this drinking bottle. If we tilt it a bit, it starts to "drip, drip, drip..."; we tilt it more and "druppity, druppity, druppity..." That's like our mindfulness. And if we really pour it out, it becomes a steady stream of water, like out of a tap, not just dripping. Meaning that: whether we stand, walk, sit, lie down or whatever, if we are always aware, then our mindfulness is the same as a steady stream of water. If we really pour it out, it's a steady stream. So, if our mind wanders, thinks of this and that, then our mindfulness is only like dripping water.

So training our mind is just like this. Whether we think of this or that, are restless, aren't together, doesn't matter. Just keep practicing continually, and you'll develop awareness until it's a constant flow. Whether standing, sitting, lying down, or whatever, that awareness will be right there with you. Do it and see!



Just sitting around, it's not going to happen by itself, you know. But if you try too hard, you can't do it either. don't try at all — still can't do it! Keep that in mind. Sometimes you don't even intend to sit in meditation, but your work's finished and you sit down, empty your mind, and pap! — you're peaceful right away. Easy, because you're right there.

Take this then — that's enough for now!

Notes

- **1.** Translators' Note: One must imagine Ajahn Chah sitting on his Abbot's cushion, surrounded by the Assembly of newly-ordained Monks and Novices, chuckling, teasing and spontaneously picking objects near him to illustrate his points more simply. Trying to keep the bounce of his words, his humour, and his joy on paper is difficult. However, the conversational tone has been kept and Lao slang replaced by

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American slang in most places.

- **2.** "are standing on their heads": the Venerable Ajahn used a common Lao expression which literally means: "raise their ass to the sky."
- **3.** "BUD–DHO": a Parikamma or "Mantra" commonly used to maintain one's attention when used in conjunction with other methods such as mindfulness of the in–and out–breath or in the walking meditation or by itself as a recollection on the Buddha.
- **4.** sabai: a Thai word generally meaning "comfortable," "content" or physical and/or mental well–being, as opposed to discomfort or dis–ease. In meditation it can imply positive happiness or neutral contentment.
- **5.** clear mindfulness: in Pali it is Sati–Sampajañña, lit. mindfulness and clear comprehension or more generally, a clear presence of mind and self–knowing.

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