

2. View

What hinders unfoldment in meditation?

It is a peculiar, incomplete view of the reason to meditate that hinders depth movement. No matter how hard you try to settle the mind with mind, mind will keep leaping around like a puppet on a string.

Mind is already unperturbed, lucid and spacious, has been, is and will be.

For even the roving thoughts, when seen, are in essence waves of clarity and manifestation - they are only made turbulent by one's views.

To see this, go out to the ocean side – perhaps to a sandy beach. Even better, spend some time on a ship traversing a sea or ocean. But even standing beside a lake or pond will help. If none of these are possible, imagine a large body of water like the ocean. Then:

Observe the ripples.

Observe the small quiet waves.

Observe the big waves that swell and rock you.

Observe the crashing waves that spill about.

Observe the towering waves that are immensely powerful.

Now take a look at the ocean. The waves and ripples are but brief manifestations of the vast ocean. They are not separate.

Imagine you are scuba diving. The waves are quite choppy and rough on the surface. As you get tossed about, choking on a little water and becoming nervous, you eventually remember to get under the surface where it is calm. Suddenly, a few feet below, it is incredibly peaceful – the struggle is gone. Now, several metres under the surface, all around you is immense space, quiet, slow, almost imperceptible shifting. The movement of the ocean is not experienced as separate. How about the fish that wander by? Do you experience them as separate from the ocean? The waves of the ocean are but small and transient changes of the vast oceanic body.

So much of the experience of living is perception at the surface, identification with the choppy waves. And believing that the patterns of the waves are the entirety of the ocean. It's as if we are sure that the waves are "IT." We so badly want to be sure of "IT." When in fact there is this limitless space, settled, yet moving, containing who knows what

wonders, what gems to be discovered. And so too, for the contemplation of the mind.

For many practitioners of meditation the waves and the ripples are what you are dealing with. Please, stop trying so hard to settle the mind. Does not the ocean settle and become quiet of its own accord? How? When the currents are just right. It's an environmental occurrence.

The consciousness will naturally settle when the currents of energy of the breath-body unravel, unknot and become clear and open.

Get to know the meaning of “the mind riding on the breath.” When the energy currents are just so, the consciousness will settle naturally, like an immense unperturbed ocean. There is nothing to do, no place to go, thoughts and concepts have merged back into the very basis of mind.

By practicing *Ānāpānasatti*, Mindfulness of Breathing, you come to unfold the profound interrelationships of breath-body-mind. Breathing (like sleep, sex and eating) is an inescapable study, so cut out the controlling and messing about. Explore what is so essential to your nature with vivid awareness, not adding or subtracting anything.

Go to the breathing as you would a prospector for rubies. All the stories are told through the breathing, gems of unfoldment abound. Breathing is release, breathing is binding, breathing is forming and dissolution.

The first aim of meditation is opening awareness to the settled mind, where not a thought or concept can be found and no effort is expended to keep it settled. It is called *samādhi*, a stable continuum of concentration. This may feel like enlightenment or paradise on earth, but really it is the basis for contemplation, the platform from which to launch innumerable explorations.

Become a miner of vastness, of the endless possibilities of manifestation.

Merge tranquillity with the laser-like power of the investigative mind. It is so important, with a continuum of tranquillity, to work with an experienced teacher to be prodded onwards, directed to incredible studies and to have the pitfalls explained. The grand view, one of total realization, needs to be heard over and over – breathed into every cell of your body. Milarepa, Tibet's great saint and yogi, in one of his

teaching songs made the point that without understanding the View, forget progress on the Path to Liberation. So, you want to be a great meditator, that's nice. But it may not be freedom.

It is so important that when the tranquillity arises, instead of basking in the sun (although often this is much needed), bore into the very nature of the tranquillity with uncompromising interest. Ask, what is this tranquillity? Wake it up! This settling, or samādhi, is the basis for contemplation, for developing insight into the nature of mind and phenomena. After having travelled so far, why stop now? Is your life going to be spent swimming in the ocean, searching for and rekindling the calm, the quietude you have experienced? This search wears a bit thin after some years. It, too, is suffering. There is so much more! Actually there is nothing else, but that needs to be seen later to be fully understood.

For many beings, the inability to let go, really let go – with clarity – is one of the greatest impediments to freedom. It has become an unconscious cultural norm that letting go is accompanied by fantasy, dreaminess, or drugged out, unconscious states. No wonder there is a fear of letting go! Such states are counterproductive to meditation.

Meditation is the ground for discovery, the ground for contemplation of mind. This confers release. This brings freedom.

For many beings, meditation has been frustrating, except for those occasional periods of glorious bliss and joy that keep you humming along and coming back to practise again and again. The meditation is not wrong, the teachers are not wrong, it is the stubborn limited view of the reason to meditate that clouds one's practice.

When meditation is used to try and cool-out from the hectic, rush of our “normal” lifestyles, something vast is missed. So much energy gets tied up in trying to get the breath to slow down, forcing the thoughts and daydreams to quiet down, the pulls and pushes to dissipate, that hearing and working with new avenues of exploration are put on hold. Perhaps, before you enter a meditation retreat, take a holiday first; go scuba diving, spend time on a sunny beach, unwind in the ocean, go bird watching and hiking, camping, gardening, go on a safari...

Why are you expending so much energy trying to be calm?

Stop trying so hard. Try this remedy. Sit or lie down so you feel comfortable. Cultivate a relaxed alertness and look straight at the busy consciousness. Look to its very heart. Follow it, study it, watch its patterns. Become a Mind Detective – “Who done it?” See and feel with all your senses the currents that push and pull, that support the hither and thither of the scattered mind. Above all, experience the energy currents, energy bundles; directly experience the connections to your body.

Have you noticed the calm spaces between the arisings of thoughts? If so, look at the spaces. What is the nature of the spaces? When are they noticed? Were they there before? What conditions in your life promote a quieting of consciousness? Foster these conditions, nurture these factors. So conditioned are you to “put down” the busy mind! Do you recognize this as anger? Holding the view that the tranquil mind is better than the busy mind is to go astray. Don’t get into a fight. It is just as important to know the scattered mind as the settled. Both have no basis. No home. Look closely. Can you find any difference between what appears to be settled and what appears to be waves of thoughts?

Yet it is very difficult to examine in depth the busy-ness without first coming to know the settled. It is akin to gasping for air at the surface of a rough ocean while not ever having experienced the riches that support the waves. Are not fish, diatoms, coral, mud and algae the ocean? How about patterns of light and absence of light? How about the currents of wind above, the movement of the earth below? And the moon, sun and planets? The snorkeler, dipping and diving?

If you have found in your practice of meditation that the settling of consciousness is elusive, then the basis of unfolding Pārami – the wholesome factors that support a continuum of depth calm or samādhi – are not yet established. Do not make the error of believing you can lay the ground work for calm and insight if the environment you live in is contrary to unfoldment:

- If the food you ingest is poisoning;
- If the relationships you enter into are often in turmoil;
- If the space you live in gives messages of depression;
- If objects in your home give off toxic chemicals;
- If the air you breathe is polluted;
- If the place where you work has poor air and light, uncomfortable furniture, and so on.

The environment shapes you and you shape the environment.

What kind of shape have you become?

Unfortunately, many people are not aware of these effects. Those who are aware of them go to ridiculous extremes to counteract the environmental problems. The extreme remedies, played out through overblown diets, exercise and other extreme means – yes, sometimes meditation – are temporary fixes. Very few beings have the strength, initially, to unfold under difficult living conditions.

With a supportive environment, unwholesome patterns are easier to liberate. Later, when pārami is strong, one can intelligently use adverse conditions for awakening.

Also, we need good spiritual friends. Friends who are working towards unfoldment are a major key to a supportive environment. And without a mentor, whose profound guidance can speak to all aspects of your being – such as talents, unwholesome states, lacks and meditative awareness, awakening will be very difficult indeed.

In addition, meditation retreats allow the time and space to come to know what environmental factors are conducive to awakening and what factors are damaging. What in your life, right now, is dis-ease-ful? Do you have the awareness to sort out and drop the unwholesome conditions and patterns that cause you and others pain?

Or do you believe it is all you, that somehow your psyche is the sole cause of the feelings and states of mind that arise moment to moment? My goodness what a load to carry! Perhaps it's happening both ways. Now, consider that there is no inner and outer environment, no separation.

Actively increase wholesome manifestations of mind/body and actively work towards wholesome spaces and environments.
