

Householder Series:

The Eightfold Noble Path

-- Right Concentration

Tonight I will talk about Right Concentration or Right Tranquility. Actually what I want to focus on tonight about Right Concentration is the breath, our life breath. In every moment that we are alive we must hold our breath in consciousness, and mostly we forget we breathe it.

We live in this very fine and beautiful sea of gas, air, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and a few other lesser inert gases, and six or eight or ten or twelve times a minute we breathe this gas into our lungs, and it goes all the way down into the little sacs or alveoli, or whatever they're called, into the lungs that fill up and exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide and cleanse our system. And somehow we are so connected with this ocean of air on the earth that we're like fish in water, we don't notice it, we don't see it, and mostly we forget we breathe it. Yet it's essential and it's so important in our physical life -- and in some way to connect with it, to touch it, is a way to open our spiritual life very practically, very straightforwardly.

I have friends whose baby was born out in the country with no doctor, and it was born breached, and it was blue and wasn't breathing. They gave this little tiny infant artificial respiration, and they sat with it and waited to see if it would breathe, whether it would be alive, whether their son would be a part of their family. They said that's where they learned what it was like to watch the breath. It wasn't even their own breath. It was like to really pay attention, to see if there will be a breath. The baby's grandmother who had done a lot of retreats, died of lung cancer a few years ago. She had developed lung cancer earlier, and had a remission and did her last dance rather wonderfully and admirably. Then when the cancer came back and she finally died, in her whole last week when her lungs were filled with fluid, she talked about waiting to see if the next breath would come, whether she would be able to breathe the next breath. She was so grateful for the meditation she had done. She said otherwise it would have driven her crazy, but here it was, it was something she could really use, and she did that for her whole last week of life. She died in a very beautiful way.

Our breath is kind of a mirror for us. Most of the time we don't look in that mirror. It's the mirror of our energy, it's the mirror of our openness. Feel how full your breath is at different times. If you want to see what's happening in you, pay attention to your breath. Is it real big, can you take a nice full sigh? Sighs are wonderful. Do you know about sighs? Everybody takes sighs, generally about once a minute, as far as I know. We do! I noticed more because of my father being on the respirator from his heart surgery two months ago when I was there. They put a tube in his throat and they have this respirator which breathes for you when you can't breathe. It has this funny thing on it. It has a

little dial on it which says, "Sigh Adjustment," and you have to sort of get it right for that person. It will make eight regular even breaths, and then there will be this big breath that it takes for you. It does that because it's part of the normal respiratory system to take regular sighs, regular big breaths. It was wonderful to see. It kind of made concrete this sense of what the breath is when it is big, when you can sigh, it is a kind of letting go. That's beautiful. So sigh. Let yourself sigh once in a while. Make it your meditation.

The breath is a mirror of how we are. Have you observed your breath when you're afraid? What does it do? It gets short. What else do you observe with your breath? It gets more rapid. Sometimes it stops. Can you feel what it does in your body? For a lot of people the diaphragm won't move hardly at all and there will be a little breathing from the chest. All kinds of changes happen with fear. Observe it. If you want to learn about fear, one good place to start with is the breath. Or when you are angry, what does your breath do? Or when you're passionate, or when you're calm, or when you're in a traffic jam, what does your breath do?

You can learn a tremendous amount in this very simple mirror of working with the breath. You can learn about openness. How does it affect your heart? When your breath is really open, what is your heart like in terms of your feelings and openness, your connection with people around? When you feel your heart closed, without judging it, look and see what your breath does and what it's like. Does this make sense to you, that you can use the breath in some way? It doesn't mean to say that the breath is always going to be wonderful and open -- That's like saying your heart should always be soft and wonderful and open. I don't know; it's not my experience. It's like flowers, they open and close.

I remember a very important and extraordinary lesson. I was sitting around with Robert Hall, whom some of you know, who is a Gestalt therapist and body worker, and one of the people who started the Lomi School. He spent a lot of years in his own practice of developing ways of working with the body, and opening, and energy, and breathing. We were reading a book about the life of Ramana Maharshi, this great Indian saint. And there were some pictures of Ramana Maharshi in the last part of his life with cancer, and his body was contorted and twisted and it looked tight. It certainly looked like he couldn't breathe very well, it looked like he couldn't move very well. And the description from the people who were with him was that he was in pain, and that he would go to sleep, and there would just be these moans and things that would come out of his body. And at the same time his eyes were exactly the same as those pictures of five or ten or twenty years before. They were wide and bright and completely clear, and there was just this real sense of depth and love. Robert looked at that and he said, "My God, here I am trying to get people to open their bodies and it really has nothing to do with it, does it?" That's not completely true. It is one end of the spectrum, but it is also true that if you breathe and if you open, and if you run, and if you exercise, that the physical opening helps the heart and the mind to open.

In fact, the heart is the heart, and it can be open in fire and it can be open in ease. But for most of us, and most of the time, breath is a mirror. It's really something to work with. You can work with it in martial arts as a way to martial your power. You can work with it if you have meetings. If they're boring or difficult, go to your breath, do ten breaths, where you just pay attention to your breath, and you'll find all your relationship to all the circumstances around you change. It's a practical tool

for living in the world. Now, what makes it practical, what makes it useful?

What makes it useful, aside from the fact that it's a mirror, is that it's the place to learn the art of concentration. Concentration has two parts to it. One part is the quieting or the tranquility. Without that we don't so often hear the voice of God, as Mother Teresa said. She says:

We need to find God -- or whatever you want to call it, our true nature -- and this cannot be found so easily through noise or restlessness. God or truth is a good friend of silence. See how nature, trees, grass grow in silence. See the stars, the moon, the sun, how they move in silence. The more we receive in silence, the more we can give in our actual life.

The first part of this element of concentration is using the breath to learn to become quiet or tranquil, to become still; not to seek quiet so much but to slow down. Our culture is so fast. We fill up our lives all the time. I know it very well when I look at my schedule book. I lived for ten years without a schedule book while I was teaching -- until I got married and had a baby, and all that stuff. And it was really a shock to get another day-by-day or week-by-week schedule and start filling it up again. It's not just that. It's the speed of the traffic, it's the speed of the news, it's the speed of our interaction. Somehow in it, we forget. Do you know what it means to go for a walk for a little while on Mt. Tamalpais or down to Point Reyes or somewhere in the country, and what it does for our ability to feel the sea of air that we live in, or to stop and reflect what we care about in our lives, or to feel the tension in our body, and somehow let it melt a little bit, or to spend time alone, to listen? Somehow I think that our speed is partly what makes the bombs. I don't think we could do it if we were slower. I really don't. So that's the first part of concentration, just slowing down a little bit, letting things settle, stop waving our arms so much.

The second part I want to go into in some depth for the next twenty minutes or half an hour is really to talk about what it's like to work with the breath as a vehicle for concentrating the mind and heart. It is somewhat technical. I've given lots of other kinds of talks. Hopefully, they are of some use for you if you're doing some regular meditation.

To concentrate the mind means to collect it, to have it become steady or one-pointed, like a candle flame in a windless place, where it's steady and it doesn't flicker so much. Every great spiritual and yogic tradition works with concentration. Do you know that? Whether it's the Hasidic prayers or the Jesus prayers or mantras or the shamans who do certain kinds of incantations or rites to concentrate the mind, not to speak of Buddhist and Hindu yogas of every kind; they all work with concentration. Do you know why that is? Do you know why? Does anybody have any idea why? Why is concentration is so stressed to collect, to concentrate the mind -- do the breath, do a mantra, focus on a light, focus on a prayer, do it over and over again, sit out in the woods as an Indian and roll a little stone around a big one until your mind gets concentrated and you have visions? Does anyone know?

THE AUDIENCE: Just to keep you present?

JACK: That's the first part of it. That's very nice. Because you can't understand what's real or true

except in the moment. Otherwise, it is thought about past and future, so it's fantasy. So that's one good reason. What else?

AUDIENCE: Gives you something to work with, collects your mind so you can use it.

JACK: Collects your mind so you can use it, and it gives you something to work with, which means it gives you a vehicle to collect it. Is that what you mean?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

JACK: Okay. So that's another reason to concentrate, in order to find a way to collect the mind. Collect the mind to be present. Why else collect it, why else concentrate? Any other reason?

You hear of all these yogis in Egypt and the Desert Fathers, in India and the Taoist monasteries learning concentration exercises. What for?

AUDIENCE: For me, it's like my energy is running off in all these different directions, until I can collect my energy and focus it.

JACK: So it's a way of focusing energy. That's another good answer, another good part of it.

Mind is like light energy, and it can be focused in several ways. If you begin to concentrate it, it's like collecting light energy in a laser. Instead of having it scattered in all directions, if you concentrate, the power of mind becomes usable when it's collected. You can train it at something and penetrate it. Another image to use is that of a lens. If you concentrate the mind, it's like grinding a lens. If you focus and you concentrate, and you come back again and again, and it becomes steady and still, you can see as if the mind were a microscope or a telescope. You can see into all other realms of consciousness through the power of concentration. Concentration is the main vehicle in almost every yogic and spiritual school for altering our level or our perspective of consciousness.

When the mind is scattered and filled with thoughts, mostly all you see is your ordinary reality. Ordinary reality is real too, but part of what helps free us is to see that it's relative, that there are some other perspectives in life. And concentration is the vehicle to discover those other perspectives. It's also the way to learn to live in the present moment, so then you can see what is true.

Suppose you were to start and work with concentrating on your breath, what would the stages or steps be like as you followed it? Here are some of the things: The first is that you just learn to get here as suggested. Okay? You count one to ten, or you count one to a hundred, or a hundred to zero backwards, or you note the rising and falling of the chest or in and out of the air, and finally you start to become more present.

Ryokan says:

My hut lies in the middle of the dense forest.

Every year the ivy grows longer,
no news of the affairs of men,
only the occasional song of a woodcutter.

The sun shines,
I mend my robe.
When the moon is out I read poems.
I have nothing to report, my friends.

If you want to find the true meaning,
stop chasing after so many things.

That's the first step for us in watching the breath, not chasing. Here's an ad I just cut out:

HOW TO GET WHAT YOU WANT:

Admit it, you want something bad, a new car, a bigger house, a more challenging job, a clean garage, a chance to unload that stuffed wolverine. You want something and you want it now. But it takes more than the power of positive thinking to make your dreams come true.

The first level of working with the breath, of watching it, not chasing after so many things, is counting, is watching the in-and-out, it's just getting here with the reality of the moment, of the breath coming in and out. That's already a lot, as you probably noticed in sitting an hour and trying to work with your breath. I don't mean that one exclusively works with the breath, because in vipassana we work with sounds and thoughts and feelings, but tonight I just want to focus on the power of working with the breath.

First you get here, you count, or you feel the in and out, or the rising and falling. Then the second level is that you can start to relate to the space between breaths. Has anyone done that in working with the breath? So you see, there's the in-breath, and there's the out-breath, and there's the rising and falling, and as you get a little more silent you start to see, "Hey, there's some room in there, there's some space." And it has two important points. One is that it begins to teach us to relate to something that's less than busy and full all the time, just teaches us to relate to the elemental quality of silence, of openness, of space, by feeling the space between the breaths.

We don't take enough time to sense space, we keep filling it up. So this little thing in the breath has something to teach us. Or if you like -- this is a technique that's useful for some people -- you can begin to use that space as a way to further continue the refined concentration by working with some points of touch. For some people they just sense space, in-out, then, "Ah, there's some space," and then the breath comes again, out of nowhere. For others, because the mind wanders a lot in that space, and it's difficult, they find it valuable to be aware of the touch point, of the lips touching together, or the hands in the lap, or the buttocks on the cushion -- in-out, touching, rising-falling, touching, in-out, lips touching; so that things start to become continuous and the mind doesn't wander off.

W. S. Merwin in this poem says:

First, forget what time it is for an hour.
Do it regularly every day.
Then forget what day of the week it is,
and do this regularly in company for a week.
Then forget what country you are in,
and practice doing it in company for a week,
and then do them together for a week
with as few breaks as possible.

Follow these by forgetting how to add
or to subtract.
It makes no difference.
You can change them around after a week.
Both will later help you to forget how to count.

Forget how to count,
starting with your own age,
starting with how to count backwards,
starting with even numbers,
with roman numerals,
starting with fractions,
with the old calendar,
going on to the alphabet,
forgetting it all until everything
is continuous and whole again.

This is the second step, of somehow learning to relate to space or things which are disparate, and our mind which is scattered -- it comes back to being more whole again. So we start to watch the breath, and we get to the point where we can let go of the past and the future and be a little more present, and there's the in and out, and we can relate to the space between breaths, and we see the breath as the mirror of our emotions. You can learn a lot. You can learn a lot by observing anything. Here we're just going into one little aspect of experience, our breath.

Then what comes, as you can relate to the space and the touch point more, you get to the point where you can let go more. It's called, "Letting Go of Some Control." And in truth, one of the greatest aids to concentration is relaxing. Concentration isn't a forcing of your mind on your breath, or on the pain, or on the pleasant sensation, or on the thought. It's much more a sense of the opening, of the softening, of the receiving. That's what allows the mind to settle, to settle on the breath, to settle on the sensation, to settle on the sound. It means our learning how to not control so much.

Have you noticed, for many people, when you start to work with the breath, there's this tendency to hurry it up, or to move it, or to change it, how it takes a little while? It takes some systematic

training to work with the breath, where finally it just breathes itself.

I remember this friend of mine, an old Tibetan monk who I met in this forest monastery. He was actually Hungarian but he ordained with the Dalai Lama years before. He said the Dalai Lama let him go up in the mountains and visit the hermits who were in their caves, who saw almost no one. He went with one of the Dalai Lama's teachers, Ling Rinpoche. He visited them. He was kind of a neophyte at that time, just learning. These people had spent 20 or 40 years in their caves or their little huts. He said, "Well, what technique do you use?" They said, "Techniques?" He said, "Yes. Do you use a mantra, do you follow your breath?" He said the first time he asked about that one of them just laughed and laughed. He said, "The breath, it breathes itself." That was all he said about it, the breath just breathes itself.

This is the letting go, of actually seeing that the world has a natural order that runs itself. We try so hard to control it. Take a rest, you know; put your feet up a little bit. You don't run your heart or your liver, and they do real good without you, you know. "Ah."

There's counting and there's getting here. There's the space between and relating to space, and the touch point. And then there's learning to let go and relax a little bit, and start to sense the natural order rather than controlling. The breath is a vehicle for seeing, like anything else. You can start to see in a more refined way, you start to see the beginning and the middle and the end of the in-breath, or the beginning and the middle and the end of the out-breath. That's an amazing thing. Most people never saw the beginning of a breath in their whole life. Why is it valuable? Who cares? So what if you can see the beginning of a breath, what's its purpose? Anybody got an idea?

THE AUDIENCE: You see that it comes and goes, that things come and go.

JACK: That's very nice. That as you start to listen, if you really concentrate, you see that wherever you are is being born and is dying; that every breath is a birth and a death; every movement, every sensation, every sound, every sight. You start to relate to one thing that maybe we need to learn about -- besides love -- and that is birth and death; that is, the arising and passing of things.

Here the breath is teaching you about the thing that everybody wants to know: What happens when you die? A lot of people do! For some people it's the last thing they want to know. "Don't tell me, I don't want to hear." But a lot of people want to know. If you want to know, look at your breath, the beginning, the middle and the end -- so you start to see it more clearly.

There's a beautiful *sutra* on the mindfulness of the breath, and here the Buddha says to some monk: Go, you guys, and find yourself some comfortable tree root underneath some tree out there, and cross your legs and sit down and close your eyes, and see if you can discover the whole nature of the world from your breath. It bears great fruit; cultivate it regularly; bring it to perfection. First, breathing in long, I know I breathe in long. Breathing in short, I know it's a short breath. Experiencing the breath in the whole body. Calming the body with the breath. Observing the breath as it arises and passes, calming the mind using the breath. There's this whole set of instructions, two thousands, three thousand years ago saying: Okay, if you want to understand about life and death, very, very simple, here you are: go take this and work with the breath. Sit down in some quiet place

and you will begin to discover it.

The next stage is refinement -- seeing the beginning, the middle, the end, what breaths are long, which ones are short, when it's held, when it's released. Then more refinement, which I'll get to: the four elements, and the mind and body. I'll get to that in a bit. So you start to refine it. You see, "Oh, here's birth and death; here's the beginning and end of things."

Then the next stage is what I call Training the Puppy. It's like, "Okay, stay," and the puppy gets up. "Stay," and it gets up and runs around. "Stay", and you do it a million times, and since the inner puppy is much more recalcitrant than the outer puppy, it finally starts to begin to learn. What's involved in training a puppy? Has anybody ever trained a puppy, outwardly trained a puppy? First of all, it takes some patience, doesn't it? Okay. And you have to be willing to let it shit all over a little bit if you want to have a puppy house broken or sit down.

Similarly it's true with the mind. As you start to concentrate, you will meet a wall or a sea of resistance. It's called *kilesa* in Sanskrit or Pali, which means "hindrance" or "defilement". It really means "burning in the mind." For example, if you try to do a kind of macho, and muscle your way into concentration, which you can do if you want -- you can experiment with it. Say, "I'm just going to concentrate on the breath and not let my mind move" -- try it for an hour, and you will see what I mean about fire, because it is very hard for the mind to slow down. It has its own momentum like a flywheel. Your mind will kick up and throw out every reason to stop. There will be old angers, new desires, pains in the body, sounds, reasons to move, and every possible thing other than feeling the breath. It's an interesting experiment to do, just to try it, not because that's really the way to learn to concentrate -- you'll wear yourself out. There is a way to do that, but it's very, very hard. Why not take it a little easier? It actually doesn't take that much longer as long as you're persevering, but you can do it. And what you discover, even when you do it more gently, is that as you start to collect it, all the resistances come up: fear, desire, anger, distraction, plans, or memories.

Part of what it means to concentrate the mind is to purify it. I don't use that word so often, but it's an important one for this learning how to deepen meditation. Purification means that there are all these forces of grasping, of fear or anger, or whatever, that keep pulling us in every direction, and to collect it or to balance it means not that we get rid of these, but that we learn somehow to let them come. And almost like the fire that comes and burns through, we don't grasp it -- we let it come and we let it go.

In watching the breath, if you start to work regularly with the breath, maybe you do it half of every sitting, or some part of your practice, then all the things which we call for the moment *kilesas* or fire or hindrances, they will all reveal themselves to you. The purification is to honor them, to give them a little kiss when they arise, let them go gently, to see them, and then come back again to the breath. And they are powerful. They are the force that kind of pull the mind around in circles.

The first thing in training the puppy is that you come to your resistance and you learn about what it means to work with resistance. If you struggle against it, it makes it twice as hard, and if you do it gently and say, "Oh, there it is, there's desire or anger wanting to take me away again," you let it go, and come back. You can really learn how to train the puppy, how to train the heart.

Once you've gone through the resistance, then the next thing that happens in training the puppy is a sense of interest. Then it's borne more fully out of this. There are two ways to express it. The first is that as you get through the resistance, even watching the resistance is actually very interesting. Has anybody ever seen what it's like when they try to put their mind somewhere or what it does? It's like a fish out of water for awhile, it just flops everywhere. Look at it! It's interesting to see what it is that keeps us out of the moment.

After awhile, as you do it, and you keep bringing it back again and again, the breath starts to have its own interest, which is like reading Agatha Christie. In the beginning the story may or may not be interesting but as you go along and you get the plot and you get all the intrigue, you really start to wonder who did it and what's going on. Similarly with the breath. At first it's difficult, but if you work with it for a while, it actually starts to become interesting. And just when you're reading Agatha Christie near the end and someone walks in the room, you don't even hear or see them because you're so interested in "who done it."

When you finally get through some of the resistance and you really start to concentrate on the breath, it gets interesting, and all of those other things which had disturbed you pass away much more easily, and you actually enjoy feeling it and seeing what it's doing.

Now, the kind of interest one sometimes needs to go through is the Zen story of a young boy going to this master who has a monastery on a stream, and saying, "Please teach me." And the master says, "You're not really sincere." "What do you mean I'm not sincere? I want to learn." The master says, "Go away." And the boy comes back again and again. Finally, this young boy comes and says, "I really want to learn." The master says, "No, you don't," and he grabs him and throws him in the water and he holds his head down under the water. The boy is kicking and screaming. Finally he lets him up when he's just about blue and out of breath. The boy asks, "Why did you do that?" The master says, "When you want to learn what I have to teach as much as you wanted that breath, then you can come and I'll teach you." That actually comes of itself.

Interest is something that also can be cultivated, can be nourished, can develop. If you work through these things that come, and you stay with it, there's an interest that comes all by itself. It's one of the factors of enlightenment; it starts to come by itself.

So it's training the puppy, working through the resistance, having the interest arise, and then you get to what Suzuki-roshi calls, "Burning Completely." He says:

In order to not leave traces with your thought, when you do something, do it completely with your whole mind and body. Like a good bonfire, you should not be a smoky fire, but learn to burn yourself completely. Throw yourself wholly into whatever you do.

That's an art, that's a gift, to love a person, to take a walk on the beach, to paint, to dance, to do your taxes, but to do them completely and not do something else at the same time. If you'll save a little more money when you pay attention that way, I don't know. But do things really completely.

There's training the puppy, going through the resistance, and discovering that the breath actually

has a lot to teach you, that it's interesting. Then the next is coming to rest. When you've finally done that, and you start to get interested, and you've done it for awhile, you come to rest on the breath. It's like what Don Juan says, "Stopping the internal dialogue" of trying to plan, and remembering or going off into the past and future and worrying, all of those things. No trace of thought, finally coming back to where there is less desire, instead of trying to keep bringing your mind back. At first, it's like a mountain, and you climb up to the top and you balance and stay on your breath, and then you fall off into sleep or restlessness, and then you struggle up, and there you are with the breath or in the moment, and you fall off, and after awhile it becomes like a valley. You do it again and again and again. Finally, you actually start to settle on the breath. It's like the mind comes to rest in the body. It will go off in sleep or restlessness or desire, but then it slides back down and you come to rest in the moment. And it's delightful, coming to rest!

Out of the coming to rest, then come the Factors of Enlightenment. There comes lightness and joy and a tremendous sense of ease; and the body, once it starts getting concentrated, changes completely. Even if you wanted to slump, you can't. The energy opens up, the breath opens up, and you just sit up straight. You can sit up straight for hours when the breath is open and you're concentrated. It happens all by itself. You don't need so much sleep either. That's good when you have babies and things like that. It happens all by itself.

And then something else comes -- light. When you really concentrate on the breath, or whatever, this very peculiar thing happens. With your eyes closed, there comes light in the mind. Some people see it as clouds, some see it like headlights turned onto them; some see it as a bright sky or sun; some see it initially as colors of green or blue, but later on it turns into white light. I don't know why, but when the mind is concentrated, it fills with light. It's not that far away. It's really accessible to a lot of people.

This afternoon I was reading these essays by Lewis Thomas. In one of them he said:

You know, we're so afraid of God in this country, in this century, in this scientific mind that we have. Even though we talk about the creation of the universe -- the scientists call it, "The Big Bang" -- there is no bang. For sound, which is a very gross level of energy, you need air for sound waves to travel. There was no air. it was empty dark space. There were no ears to hear it. There wasn't sound. What it really was, instead of a big bang, it was the great light.

That's a more accurate description, whether it's true or not, of what that first cosmic explosion was, or whatever you want to call it. It's a little scary to call it "The Great Light," it's a little bit too spiritual. So we'll call it "The Big Bang." It's sort of like a tank or something like that, and scientists can relate to it in some way. So what happens? You come to rest and you come to this sense of peace and then spontaneously in the mind comes light. It's this fantastic thing. That's part of the reason why all these yogic and other traditions also work with concentration, because it opens the mind and the heart to allow our natural light to shine. And it's literally light. I mean, you can sit in the dark and it seems like lights are being shone on you, many, many kinds of light. The mind becomes stable and joyful, rapture comes when it's peaceful.

Why is there joy when the mind is concentrated? Does anybody have any idea?

THE AUDIENCE: Freedom from yourself.

JACK: That's a good one. Getting away from oneself is always a treat. Why else?

THE AUDIENCE: It's a natural state.

JACK: It's a natural state, so there's rest. There's another simple reason.

THE AUDIENCE: There's nothing else you want.

JACK: There's nothing else you want, which is to say, when you're really concentrated, the rent check, your girlfriend, your difficulties with your parents or your children, next year's travel plans, all are gone because there's no thought. The past and the future have disappeared, and when they're gone it gets very groovy. It gets real quiet and very happy because there's no worry and there's no fear. Fear is always about something that hasn't come, so is worry, so is desire.

This is kind of the anatomy of what the present moment can have for you in some ways. You get to this level of lightness, joy. Now, the ability of mind is another thing that happens. If you train concentration, you get to a point where this amazing thing happens, where you decide, "I want my mind to be here, to listen to sound." You put it there when it's trained in concentration, and it just stays there, and you listen as if you'd turned the radio to a particular station and it just stays there. There isn't thought or restlessness and interruption; it just stays there. Or you say, "I want it to focus on this," -- small or large -- and the mind becomes malleable, shapeable, movable. It's the most delightful thing; it's fantastic. And you can do that.

These kinds of education aren't part of our school system, but they are really our birthright. It's the training of our own heart and our own mind so it becomes joyful and light, peaceful and malleable. Then what happens? Guess! Are you ready?

THE AUDIENCE: You try to hold on.

JACK: You get attached, that's right. It's called, The Corruptions of Insight which arise, the defilement of Spiritual Materialism in its refined form. You say, "This is groovy, I want more of it." It's like any other drug. And you get attached to the light, or the lightness, or the joy, or the peace, or whatever it is, and then you find that you're stuck there. So you have to discover even in that moment that there's some deeper level of freedom. You're still working with the breath and all these states come and you try to hold them. Let them just come and go. Those too are not freedom; they're simply very groovy states of mind. They're very pleasant, they're illuminating, light and peaceful but they're temporary. Has anybody had a state of mind stay? Somebody last week yelled out "ignorance". In general, it's not the case. Do you know what I mean?

So you do this, and you get to where the mind becomes stable and clearer, and so forth, and you're with the breath and it becomes so fine. It's like the tiniest leaves or the littlest movement. It's almost like the body breathes rather than the breath breathing, or the spring air comes and breathes you.

It's wonderful. And the state of mind is very peaceful and you stop grasping it.

Then you reach what's called Access Concentration. "Access" means it gives you access to all the realms and all those weird spiritual texts and things you read about, because at this point there are very few thoughts. You rest in the present moment. The mind is very clear, and tranquil, malleable, alert and mindful spontaneously, without struggle. There's a kind of clear seeing. Then things start to reveal themselves to you out of this Access Concentration. It's almost as if the mind or the lens is clear, like a crystal goblet, and you can see deeply with a microscope or a telescope way out into space.

Has anyone heard of the biologist named Agassis? There's a big museum of glass flowers at Harvard. He was one of the great botanists around the turn of the century and before. A student of his went to begin his training as a botanist in the 1880's, and Agassis took him and said, "You want to learn to be a botanist or a biologist. Here, take this fish," and he took this kind of dead fish and sat it on a piece of glass in front of him, and he said, "Study it, observe it, and tell me what you can see about it." Then he went away. He left the student there in the morning and he went away for the whole damned day. The student stayed there for awhile. He looked. There's a dumb dead fish, right? He really got bored and more irritated that his mentor and teacher didn't come back. "What did he want? Sure it's a fish, it's got fins, it's got eyes, it's got scales, it's got six fins, it's a six-fin fish, and it's got a little yellow over here near the gills, or something like that." There was nothing especially interesting about it. It was like many he had seen before -- scales, mouth, eyes, yes, a tail. In an hour he thought he had seen all there was to see. Time rolled on and the teacher didn't come back for a long time. He was getting angrier and more irritated. Finally, after he had gotten back from lunch, he was so discouraged. He wished the dumb old man had given him something more interesting. Then in order to kill time, he sat down with a piece of paper and he started to draw the fish, "Alright, I'll draw it." In drawing, he began to notice things. He discovered, for example, the way that the scales overlapped one another, and then he began to see as he drew the eyes that the fish didn't have any eyelids. Then he began to see the textures of the veins in the scales. He kept on looking and drawing and it got very interesting to him, and he drew for the whole afternoon into the evening.

Agassis came in and looked at his drawing and said, "You haven't even begun to look at this fish yet." The guy was heartbroken. The teacher said, "I'll come back in a couple of days. You let me know what you can really see in the fish." He spent two more days drawing different sides and aspects of the fish. And he said those three days, that particular training was the foundation of his entire graduate work and his whole career as a botanist.

We're not taught that so much in our culture. But here we are with the breath now. We're up to the level of Access Concentration. As you sit and start to get quiet, you're at the level where you're in the present moment, not so distracted by other things, and really with the breath, what can you begin to see? You see the four basic elements that make up the physical world, what Plato called, "Earth, Air, Fire and Water, and maybe the Egyptians or the Indians throw metal in there as well. I don't know why. More or less the same system. They aren't some theory -- earth, air, fire and water -- they are a description or actually how you perceive physical matter.

Put your hand on the floor for a second. What do you feel? Tell me what you feel.

THE AUDIENCE: Hardness.

THE AUDIENCE: Softness.

JACK: Hardness or softness. What else do you feel?

THE AUDIENCE: Cool.

JACK: Temperature. What else?

THE AUDIENCE: Rough.

JACK: Rough. Okay, so there's the texture. What's the roughness? Go into it with your attention. What does roughness actually feel like?

THE AUDIENCE: Highs and lows.

JACK: Okay. So it's shape, but it's also different areas. Pay attention. See if it's not different areas of where it's hard here and soft there; just hardness and softness alternating. What else do you feel? So there's temperature, and then different areas of hardness and softness. Anything else?

THE AUDIENCE: Dry.

JACK: So you feel whether it's moist or dry.

THE AUDIENCE: Flexible.

JACK: So there's movement, the solidity or lack of it. Anything else?

THE AUDIENCE: Space.

JACK: What's the space? I don't feel space.

THE AUDIENCE: Between the hardness.

JACK: So you feel points of hardness and lack of it. Okay. What else? One more thing to look for especially. It's still, it's not moving. Can you feel that? Okay. Do you feel "floor"? Anybody feel "floor" or "carpet"? No such thing for your hand, but there is this hardness and softness.

Similarly with the breath, if you observe it, instead of there being an in-breath or an out-breath or a rising or a falling, if you look at it closely like the guy looked at his fish, what do you see? You see what's called the Fire Element or the Temperature Element. Sometimes parts of it are cool or hot. You see temperature or you experience temperature. You see the Earth Element, which really is the element of hardness and softness, and sometimes there's pressure, which is more hardness, and sometimes there's not much pressure in it and it's soft, or there are little dots of pressure and space

in between where there's less pressure. So you see hardness and softness in the breath, you experience hot and cold, you experience fluidity, the Water Element. And the Air Element is really the element of motion or vibration, so you experience it when it's still or when it's vibrating or moving more.

Does anybody ever experience anything else through their physical senses? Temperature, pressure, hardness and softness, movement, solidity, vibration. So what happens when you observe just this simple thing of the breath and your mind is concentrated? Play with it in your sitting. It doesn't have to be that concentrated, you just have to get here some. You can start to see that what you thought was breath or floor or wall through your body senses is actually this play of the basic elements. You can find everything that Plato and the Chinese philosophers and all these other people who are physicists have looked at. What is basic sense perception made of simply in the breath? There is no breath. There's coolness, there's little tiny, very soft pressure; there's vibration and movement; that's all. You know in the belly there's expansion, which is a different shape of that same pressure, and hardness and softness. That's it! And the whole world, instead of being solid, starts to reveal what its nature is, which is the play of the physical elements.

Then you'll start to see the mind, the Mental Elements. This is called *nama* and *rupa*. *Rupa* is the Physical Elements that you perceive, and when you look closely they're all a dance, they're all changing. There's no floor, there's no wall, there's just changing sensations. This is using the mind as a microscope. When you start to look closely and to experience it, it seems solid on this level, which it is, and you can use your mind the same way someone uses a microscope. You look down into the pond water and you see it's alive with things. And if you look at anything closely with your concentration and awareness, it dissolves into a changing dance of sensations. And then the Mental Elements, which are feelings and reactions and the consciousness which knows it. I won't go into that so much tonight, but you start to see the play of these two things, of Physical and Mental events. That's all that there is, this dance of light and shadow and the perception of it. You see more deeply the arising and passing of things then, so you get to a deeper level of birth and death, and you see that not only every breath, but every sense door, every sound, every sight, becomes vibration. Everything that you look at from that refined quality of the breath starts to teach you the movement of life; Impermanence; The Dance.

You can learn so much just watching your dumb breath, really, and there's a lot to be seen in it. And at times admittedly it's boring. You learn about boredom when it's boring.

And finally, the last thing to say about it tonight, just to go into this a little more, is that at that point one also has the possibility, besides the discoveries of insight, of seeing that it's really changing, arising and passing mental and physical states, empty of any person, no separateness at all. All the kinds of wisdom that one reads about are available in just observing the breath.

One can also enter all the realms of what are called *jhanas* or high states of concentration. When the mind becomes so settled on the breath, then there arises joy, rapture, tranquility and concentration, and the concentration is applied and it stays there; it's sustained. You can turn your mind to space and just experience what it's like to be with space without any wandering of mind, the formless *jhanas*. You can turn your mind to a color, blue or green, and develop it until the whole

mind becomes filled with a particular color and the energy of that color. Then, when you do this, and you cultivate it really well, you have Access Concentration. If anyone is interested in this level stuff, most of which I have not done -- I've played with it a little bit, not the powers part -- in this book, "The Path of Purification," there are chapters on how to develop concentration, and then ones with all the psychic powers, because all the powers of mind come from the power of concentration; how to read other people's minds or how to walk on water or how to do all these things. I don't know whether you can really do them. I haven't seen many of them done except maybe reading of minds. But it's said that they all come through this tremendous power of concentration.

The way to walk on water apparently, if you want to know, is to develop concentration to this very high degree where the mind is totally stable on the Earth Element until you become like the earth itself, and then you focus on the water and you walk on it. One of the teachers where I studied in the Sun Lun Monastery said:

In these days, although concentration of mind and some of the insights and opening are very possible, many, many people can do that, the level of concentration for the supernatural powers are difficult to acquire.

Let us say that one practices the Earth Element exercise and gains a mastery of it. To do the psychic power stuff, you not only have to be able to attain these very high levels of stability of mind, but you have to master it so you can go in and out of different ones in a moment's notice. Suppose you've mastered it, and I know a few people in Asia who have mastered these things to some extent.

Let us say that such a yogi then goes to a pond and seating himself near it, arouses in himself the element of the earth meditation. Then looking upon the waters of the pond, he endeavors to turn them into earth, so that he may walk across them. He will find these days at most that the water thickens to a slushy earth which cannot really uphold his feet when he attempts to walk on it.

Perhaps yogis in other countries have done better than I, but I believe the times not so opportune as they used to be.

This guy is furious.

I'll read one poem from Kabir to end, and you may have heard it before. This is Kabir, a wonderful Indian poet. He's talking about a clay jug, which means one's own body or a clay jug; it doesn't matter; they're the same. He said:

Inside this clay jug, there are canyons and pine mountains
and the maker of canyons and pine mountains.
All seven oceans are inside, and hundreds
of millions of stars.
The acid that tests gold is there,
and the one who judges jewels,
and the music from the strings no one touches,

and the source of all water.

If you want the truth,
I will tell you the truth,
friend; listen.
The God whom I love is inside.

How can you see that in your body or in a cup, whatever cup you want, all seven oceans and hundreds of millions of stars? You can, through your inner vision, through the eye of concentration, birth and death, and every realm of existence is possible through this collection and concentration and focusing of the energy of mind. Like a laser, like a telescope, like a microscope. I'm not suggesting that you do all that yogic stuff. It's fun but it takes years and lifetimes to do some of that stuff. It's good, it's nice to do. However, in a much more practical way, you can work with the breath. You can take half of your meditation every day, fifteen minutes or half an hour. You can work with it when you are running or jogging. You can work with it when you're in a meeting, how to calm down. When you get really quiet, and you take some time to meditate for part of a day or you sit, then you can start to really study it like it was that fish or like it was a flower. And in it you can learn a lot about birth and death, about all the resistances and the fears and the fires, and what it's like to let go of them and to rest in the present moment. You can learn a lot about the elements that make up who we are, the physical elements, the mental elements, consciousness itself. All of that can be revealed in the simple thing of observing the breath.

I give it to you tonight as something to talk about, to give you some sense and maybe a little inspiration, that even in this very rote and simple exercise, there are worlds to discover. Just as if you could take a flower and pick it and really look in it and understand that one flower, you could understand everything in one flower.