

Things as They've Come to Be

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Sometimes at the end of suttas, when the Buddha has been teaching the monks, he concludes by telling them to go meditate. Actually, what he says is to go do jhana, because that's the kind of meditation he taught. Some people think that jhana is only one of two types of meditation he taught, that he also taught vipassana, but there's never any passage where he tells anybody to go do vipassana. It's always, "Go do jhana." This is because he saw jhana as a practice where you develop both tranquility and insight together. In other words, you need to develop tranquility and insight just to get into jhana to begin with, to get into good states of concentration. Then when you've developed that concentration, you can use it to develop qualities of tranquility and insight even further.

So try not to see the two qualities as separate. When you're steadying the mind, you've got to have some understanding of what you're doing. After all, the first jhana involves directed thought and evaluation, which are called *sankharas* – verbal sankharas – and sankharas are the topics of insight. When you direct your thoughts to the breath and then evaluate the breath, this is how you settle down. The more precisely you evaluate the breath, the more sensitive you are to the breath sensations in the body, then the more you can make them a comfortable place to be. And in the course of doing that, you learn things both about the breath and about the mind: what kind of sensations the mind likes, what kinds it doesn't like; how the mind affects the breath, how the breath affects the mind. Right there is a lot of raw material for insight.

But in the beginning your purpose is more to settle the mind. This is the tranquility side of meditation practice, finding the sensations that are easiest to stay with and learning how to maximize those sensations so that you can develop a oneness of mind around them. "Oneness" here means not only being steadily with one object, but also allowing the object to fill your awareness, so that it's the one thing you're aware of. When you focus on breathing, it's not just the air coming in and out of the lungs. It's a sensation of energy that flows through the whole body, and you're sitting in the middle of this vast breathing process that affects every nerve, every muscle. The whole experience of your body is related to the breath. The more you can perceive the breath in that way, the easier it is to settle down. And the easier it is to *stay* settled down, working on what the Buddha calls the enlarged mind – *mahaggatam cittam* – an awareness that's all around. That kind of awareness is what allows you to see things for what they are. It's the foundation for the vipassana side of jhana practice. In

other words, the Buddha doesn't say to stop doing jhana in order to start doing vipassana. He just says to learn how to look at the jhana in a different way, as a process of fabrication, how it's put together.

We often think that vipassana means seeing things as they are, the idea being that there's something already out there – things as they are – and they're all covered over by our preconceived notions, our mental fabrications. What we've got to do is clear those fabrications away and that will leave just the pristine things as they are. But that's not really how insight works. That understanding actually gets in the way of insight's arising because the Buddha didn't say, "things as they are." He said, "things as they've come to be": how they've come into being. That's a process of fabrication. It's not the case that fabrications lie on top of pristine things as they are. Fabrication is how those things have come into being in the first place.

So once the mind is settled down you want to look at the fabricating that goes on in the mind to see how the things you experience contain a very large element of fabrication. The fabrication is your intentional input: That's what the Buddha wants you to see. You might think that if only you could get rid of your fabrication you would see the pristine things as they are, but if you take away the fabrication the things are no longer there. Your experience of the world is a process of fabrication; to gain insight you have to see that fabrication in action. And the best place to see it in action is when the mind is really still, when you're fabricating a state of stillness in the mind.

To get really familiar with the fabrication process, you have to keep doing it with as much skill as you can. It's like learning about eggs. You could sit and look at an egg for days, but what would you know about it? Not very much, for all you can see is the shell. But what if you can crack it open? You see what's inside. And then you can take what's inside and make it into different things. You can make it into scrambled eggs, fried eggs, omelets, soufflés. And the more skilled you are at making different egg dishes, the more you understand eggs: how they react to different kinds of heat, what they do when you put them over low heat, what they do when you put them over high heat, what they do when you mix them with different ingredients. The more you work with the eggs in this way, the more you understand them.

It's the same with the mind. If you really want to understand the fabrication of the mind, make it into a nice soufflé. In other words, very purposefully fabricate something really good with your mind, like a nice state of concentration with a nice comfortable breath. And in doing so, you learn a lot more about the mind than you would simply looking at it without any knowledge of cause and effect. You've got to manipulate it to see how cause and effect are operating.

That's when you understand the process of fabrication. You get the mind really still and try to develop an all-around awareness. Then you protect that awareness. That's when you start seeing fabrication in action. As you try to maintain your concentration, what destroys it? At first we think that it's

destroyed by things coming in from the outside, but that's not the case. A lot of the inside fabrication comes bubbling up to destroy it as well. Sounds don't destroy your concentration, it's your *reaction* to sounds. What other people do doesn't destroy your concentration, it's what *you* do. As Ajaan Chaa says, sounds don't disturb you, you disturb the sounds.

If you want to really see this clearly, the best place to see it is in the mind with this all-around awareness. Don't leave this awareness. If you leave jhana in order to gain insight, you've lost your foundation and you just thrash around. And the mind can get very anxious, very alienated, very threatened by the insights you try to push on it, because it realizes it doesn't have a foundation.

So stay in your foundation and look to see what's going to arise there. Like a spider on a web: You want to be sensitive to the whole body in the same way that the spider is sensitive to the whole web. The best way to do that is to have all the different strands connected. That's why we work on connecting all the comfortable sensations in the body so that they form a network, a network of heightened sensitivity inside. Then all you have to do is stay in touch with the network. As soon as anything comes up – maybe a little stirring here and there on the boundary line between the body and mind – you sense it through the network. As soon as you sense it, you can zap it. A little stirring forms and you can tease it out, un-form it, zap it. If you're not quick to zap it, the mind will identify it as a thought about this or that, and then you create a whole thought-world based on the way you labeled the stirring.

The best way to see the stages in how that happens is to try to stop them as soon as you notice them and dissolve the thought away. You may find that a part of the mind gets frustrated when you zap things in this way. It wants to continue weaving those thoughts, exploring those thought-worlds. If you want to understand that compulsion to keep creating these thought-worlds, one of the best ways is to thwart it. Keep saying, "Nope, nope, nope." As soon as there's the slightest little bit of recognition that this is a thought about that, that's a thought about this, dissolve it – no matter what the thought may seem to be – and see which part of the mind starts screaming. That's how you start understanding the will, the intentional element, behind the fabrication. Once you understand it, you can dismantle it bit by bit by bit. This way you get more and more sensitive to the parts of the mind that you use to keep hidden from yourself. As you bring them out into the open, that's where insight can do its work.

These things don't come out of their lair unless you stand in the entrance, to keep their food from coming in. Or it's like people who live in underground strongholds who like to pull the strings: They won't come out unless they feel frustrated because they can't pull the strings anymore, so you have to step on their strings.

This is how you ultimately come to understand the whole process of fabrication. And where do you look for it? Wherever there's stress. Ajaan Suwat used to mention this often: Look at where there's stress, and that's where you'll

see fabrication; where you see fabrication is where you see the ignorance that's been causing you to suffer. As you bring more and more of that ignorance out into the open, there comes a point where it just stops – because you see even the slightest little things that would cause stress. In seeing these things, you replace the ignorance with knowledge. All of the background commentating that goes on in the mind and is trying to direct everything: That comes more and more to the fore. When you see it clearly, you can allow it to stop. And that's when you come to see something unfabricated, where the stress really ends. You don't have to go out of concentration in order to see it. You take the concentration apart from within.

So this is why, when you're trying to gain insight and you're feeling strung out and anxious, it's a sign you've lost your foundation. You're looking in the wrong place. Get the mind into a good state of concentration, have it all-around aware, and then start looking at the process of fabrication as it appears from this viewpoint. You don't have to go anywhere else.

Someone once asked me how I dealt with people who found the experience of Awakening to be disorienting. That's about as wrongheaded a question as you can get. Awakening is very orienting – the most orienting thing in life. It shows you that there's something a lot more solid and reliable than you'd ever imagined before. It shows you something deathless and totally free from suffering. And where do you look for it? You look right here: right where the mind is settled and still. Then you learn to see that settled stillness as a process of fabrication, and you start taking it apart right where it's happening. You don't have to go anywhere else.