

The Real Thing

May, 2001

A lot of the practice is looking at what's right here, what's already right here. Instead of trying to create something in the future, we just take apart what we've got right here.

Like the chant on the body right now. I know a lot of people get disappointed when they first come here. The first chant they hear in English is, "This body of mine..."

They want something inspiring, something that will lift them up. But what do they get? "This body of mine." And it doesn't say very nice things about the body, either. But the question is: Are those things lies? Did the Buddha lie to us about the body? Go down the list: Is there anything he says that's there in the body that's not in the body? And are any of those things clean?

The question is, why do we focus on this? Because we ordinarily don't look at what's right here. We keep making things up.

Ajaan Suwat once said that this is one of the big problems of the mind: It's constantly dealing in make-believe. It's like little kids saying, "Okay, I'll be the doctor and you be the patient." And even though they know they're not the doctor and not the patient, they play out those roles. And in spending our time in make-believe from a very early age, we're taught to ignore things that are right in front of our noses.

So the practice means turning around and looking at what's right in front of our nose. And the big thing is that there's a huge amount of attachment to the body. The body takes up so much of the day, so much of our time, so much of our thinking, so much of our energy, just picking it up and moving it around.

I've been going through physical therapy exercises recently because of my back, and realizing that just in holding your body, there's a lot of energy that goes into holding it properly. If you haven't been holding it properly, learning how to hold it properly is a major reorganization.

There are so many different areas where the body requires such a huge amount of our time. And yet we tend to block it out of our awareness, this particular attachment.

We want to hear about learning how to renounce the ego. Well, the big renunciation right here is learning how to renounce this attachment to the body. How do you live with the body without being obsessed by it or possessed by it? That's the real trick—because only then is there real time to focus in on the mind.

So take the body apart. Wherever you find that there's a sense of attachment, a sense of clinging, you learn how to think in ways that will pry that clinging loose.

Start first with your own body and then go to other people's bodies. Some people think this is an unhealthy state of mind. But, No, everybody is the same, we all have the same parts.

And “beautiful” people have the same kind of livers and lungs we that we have. We’re all equal in that area. So we have to keep that in mind, just as a way of cutting through not only our attachment to our own body but our attachment to lust, our belief that lust is a good thing.

It’s not so much that we’re really attached to that other person’s body. We’re more attached to our lust, and then the attachment to the lust colors our view of that other person’s body.

This is where our real attachment is: right here in the mind. So that’s where we have to learn how to deal with our affection for our lust. We learn how to look at it, take that apart. Again, that’s something that’s right in front of our eyes and yet we don’t see it.

This is why the practice requires just sitting down and looking at what’s right here. You look at the body, look at the breath. Try to get your awareness focused on what’s right here in the present moment to *see* what’s right here. The Dhamma’s proclaiming itself day-in, day-out, and yet we’re ordinarily turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to it.

When we talk about ignorance: Ignorance is not just a passive thing. Sometimes it’s an active ignoring, focusing on the things we want to see and denying the things we don’t want to see. We’ve got to learn how to look at what’s actually right here. And this is the big problem right here: this attachment to “this body of mine.” As long as that remains unexplored territory right here, there’s not going to be much you’ll be able to see in your own mind. We’ve got to get through this issue first.

Then when you get to the insights into the mind, it’s a similar sort of thing. People read the account of the Buddha’s awakening and they’d like to hear about lights and all the phantasmagoria that you hear in other people’s great religious experiences. But what does the Buddha talk about? “This is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the path.” No lights. No background music. Just something very simple.

But notice the way the Buddha talks about the insight that gets you there. There’s one passage where he asks, “What do I teach? I teach, ‘This is suffering.’” That’s the kind of insight we’re looking for. Look at how that sentence is phrased. It’s talking about something that’s right in front of your nose. You just point to it.

So that’s the kind of discernment we’re talking about here. It’s not discernment that goes spinning off into great big constructions. It’s a matter of learning how to look at what’s right here. “This is suffering. This is the cessation of suffering. This is the cause of suffering.” You’re looking at things directly.

Now, that requires that the mind be really quiet, and that all the disturbances involved with the body be cleared away, so that you can look simply at events in the mind as they’re happening and can point to, “This is this and that’s that.”

When the Buddha talks about the five khandhas, he says, “Such is form, such its origination, such its passing away.” The “such” here means, “in this way.” Again, it’s a pointer word. It’s something that you’re watching, not something that you’re theorizing about. You’re

actually looking at it happening: “Oh, this is this and that’s that.” This is what those words are referring to. You’re seeing them directly right in front of your eyes—the eyes of the mind.

And finally, as you watch those things, you begin to realize that all the great things that you were attached to were constructed out of these simple little events. And there’s not much to them: just arising, staying for a moment, passing away, arising, passing away.

And you wonder why the mind wanted to play these games of make-believe based on this stuff that just arises and passes away. There’s a real sense of disenchantment, sometimes even revulsion over the fact that you spent all that time on nothing.

It’s like going to a movie and realizing that all you’re watching is just lights flashing on a screen. There’s nothing up there. And yet you can get excited about it, you can cry about it, you can laugh, get scared—whatever emotion the movie is designed to create in you. But it’s just lights flashing on the screen and sounds coming out those speakers, that’s all. Yet you create this experience out of it, you create this reality out of it. To gain awakening is like waking up to that fact: These states of becoming that you inhabit, that you are, are things you just create in this way. There comes a sense of real disenchantment with the whole process. A desire to get out.

So if you see what’s arising along with the suffering and say, “Oh, this is the cause of suffering,” you see it directly. Then you let go. You don’t have to tell yourself to let go. It’s just a matter of, “This is what that is, and this is what’s causing all that suffering.” It’s not necessary. Drop it.

Finally you’ll get to the point that there’s no “this” or “that” basically – all the “thises” or “thats” you can point to have passed away. There’s just what’s there, with no signs, nothing pointing to anything.

On coming out of that experience, you say, “Oh, there’s this, too.” That’s all it is. You don’t say, “Hey! I discovered this!” Or, “I was able to attain that!” There’s not that kind of thought at all. There’s just the realization that “There is this.” And there’s no sense of anybody in there attaining it. It’s just, okay, there is this aspect of experience as well. And it’s amazing.

You listen to some people talk about their awakening experiences and the big point of their talking about it is the “I” did this and “I” attained that. As the Buddha said, “That’s a sign that there’s still something left to let go of.”

But the realization you really want is just, “Oh, there’s this as well”—along with a sense of great relief that comes along with it. Because you realize it wasn’t anything you did. The path that got you there was something you did, but the deathless isn’t anything you did. It’s something that’s there on its own.

It’s hard to imagine people getting all excited and buying a book on “There is This.” But for the person who gets there, it makes all the difference in the world.

So again, we like to hear about the wisdom, hear about all the great insights. But the insights are things that have to be seen right here, right now. To understand them, and for them

to do their work, you have to get your mind right here, right now, looking at these things directly—and not turning your gaze away from anything that's there.

A lot of the stuff you're going to see is your own stupidity, your own make-believe, the games your mind played with itself. But if your mind is in a good solid state of concentration, it's not deflected by those things. It just keeps looking in, looking in. Once the mind is in good concentration, there's a strong sense of well-being and a willingness to look in deeper and really get to the root of what is all this going on right here. And all these big issues in life, what are they made of? Well, look at them directly as they arise, as they pass away immediately. Look at them in a way that's based on this solid state of concentration you're working on.

That way, you can get the mind in a place where it really sees these things directly, "Oh, this really is this and that really is that." That's where it all makes sense. And that's where the wonder and the amazing quality of the Dhamma is. It's not in the things you can read about in books and groove on the insights. It's the actual experience, "Oh"—and there's no comparison to that.

So keep looking straight right here. If you see your own defilements, fine. It's better than not seeing them—even though they may seem upsetting when you see, "Look at all this distraction in the mind." Most people have that distraction but they don't see anything wrong with it, it's fine. It's what their life is all about.

But when you start out to meditate and you see distraction, that, at least, is a step in the right direction: "Look at all this distraction. There it is." That realization gives you the impetus you need to do more work on it, until you finally get some mastery over the states of the mind so that you can settle down. And then you're in a position to start seeing more deeply what's actually going on. That's where the marvel of the Dhamma comes.

So as the Buddha said, his duty was to point: This the path; the duty of the Buddha is simply to point the way. If he said too much, it would get in the way.

Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about how Ajaan Mun used to talk about, "You practice this and you practice that," and as soon as he'd get to some great realization, he'd bypass it and go onto the next step of how you'd get beyond that. He wouldn't dwell on the insights. As Ajaan Maha Boowa finally figured out, it was because if you learn too much about the insights beforehand, that would become another *saññā*, another game the mind would play with itself when it got to that stage.

So, meditation is a treasure hunt. They tell you that there's something really good out there and this is how you go about searching for it. But they don't want to tell you too much about it because you would always want to take the words as a substitute for the real thing. And there is no substitute.

When you get there, the words are just barely verbal "thises" and "thats." They're just pointers. But what they're pointing to is the real thing.