

## *Objectivity*

*February 25, 2005*

Some people make a big deal out of the fact the mind is never totally objective, never totally neutral. From that they claim that since there's no objectivity, everybody is entitled to his or her subjective opinion. Everyone's entitled to do what they want, to define happiness as they want, and to search for happiness in any way they want, because, as they say, there are no objective standards.

Well, the mind may not be objective, but there are objective patterns of cause and effect in experience. In other words, we all want happiness, but some forms of happiness are more true than others, more lasting than others. Some ways of looking for happiness work and others don't. The Buddha took advantage of his discovery of cause and effect, and he put it to good use by applying it to our desire for happiness.

Every desire, skillful or unskillful, is aimed at happiness. It's on the basis of this that we can reason with our desires. You can point out to your unskillful desires how they're really not getting anywhere, how they're not producing the happiness they promise. In some cases, you have keep rubbing their noses in this before they're willing to admit it. But eventually it has to get through. Still, for the message to really get through, you also have to offer other types of happiness to show that, Yes, it is possible working with skillful desires, to create a greater happiness that's more lasting, more satisfying, more gratifying. So you can't just argue with your desires in the abstract. You have to offer them evidence.

This is what we're working on as we practice generosity, virtue, and meditation. We're trying to show to ourselves that these activities really do provide a happiness that's more lasting than anything that unskillful desires can offer. Particularly when you're meditating: As the Buddha said, a major factor in the first jhāna is pleasure and rapture born of seclusion. In the second jhāna, it's pleasure and rapture born of singleness. In other words, in the first case, simply protecting your mind from all the unskillful chatter, isolating it from the pull of unskillful desires, creates a sense of ease in and of itself. You want to learn to be sensitive to it. It may not seem all that striking to begin with, but the longer you allow that space of seclusion, the potential for ease, the potential for rapture there in the body begins to grow, it begins to show itself.

This requires patience, and patience requires conviction.

This is why it's important to associate with people who are well along the way in the path, so that your conviction has some basis, so that it has the power to

ward off unskillful desires—if not permanently, at least enough to give yourself some time, so that you can work on the practice. Then, as you begin to see the results within yourself, you don't need to depend on the outside examples so much anymore. As you gain more confidence, the mind really settles in.

That's when you get the rapture and pleasure born of unification or unity, oneness. This pleasure is what gives force to the argument. You begin to have something to compare with the happiness you get from unskillful activities, and your desire to cultivate skillful desires gains more weight.

Notice that you're still using desires to overcome desires—skillful desires to overcome unskillful desires. The mind is not totally objective yet, not totally neutral yet. But you are making use of the one thing that every desire has in common: the desire for happiness. You're simply taking time to take that desire seriously, to use it to good effect. You're also proving to yourself the worth of really looking carefully, with as much objectivity as you can.

From there on in the practice, both as you develop tranquility and insight, it's a matter of showing yourself: When you do the meditation this way, what results come about? And in particular, is there still some stress, some discomfort, some burdensomeness in this state of mind? In other words, is this happiness really pure yet?

Again you make use of the fact that you're partial toward happiness, toward ease, toward pleasure and well-being, but you use that desire as motivation to make yourself more observant. You learn how to settle the mind down, get it established, have it gain confidence in a state of concentration, and you use that desire to want to understand how this state of concentration is put together, and what might be a subtler happiness than that. You do that by looking for where there's stress still in there. It's usually in the way you put the concentration together.

So it's a matter of stilling the mind and of asking the right questions and of learning how to develop an all-around gaze, so that no matter what comes up in the mind, you're more willing to look at it simply as an event. You're less and less inclined to identify with it. You take your desire for happiness, which is essentially how you define yourself as a person, and as you refine it, you begin to learn that the refinement requires a not-self strategy as well. Be very clear about what you don't want to identify with, what causes suffering.

That way, you take your partiality for happiness and you turn it into a reason to be more and more objective, less and less inclined to side with one point of view over another without good evidence.

So even though the mind tends to be partial, you can find common ground among all your desires, and use that common ground as a basis for becoming more impartial, more objective, more clear-seeing, so that you can bring yourself to the point where you let go of the last attachment, the last bit of ignorance that stands in the way of total happiness.

It's only then that you can say the mind is totally objective, totally neutral, because it's found the happiness it wants. From that point on, desire isn't necessary anymore. When it's no longer necessary, it doesn't have the power it used to have to skew your perceptions.

So here we can see the Buddha's skill as a strategist, a tactician. If you sit around and wait for a totally objective truth to come and hit you over head, it's never going to happen. You have to learn how to use your partiality and combine it with as much honesty as you can muster. That's how total neutrality, total objectivity can be found. It's only when the mind has found the happiness it really wants, when it can admit 100% what the truth is—because it no longer has any hidden agendas. But that doesn't mean you have to wait until you get 100% guarantee that you can trust the mind. You can trust it now to certain extent. Trust its desire for true happiness. Take that desire seriously. And if you're true to that desire, it'll take you where you want to go.