The Dhamma Eye

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Thai word for concentration is “dang jai man,” which means to be firmly intent. It literally means to take the mind and set it up firmly. You have to set up an intention and then stick with it. You’re going to stay with the breath. You’re going to stay here in the present moment. And then you have to maintain that intention. This is where the work of the meditation comes in. Because there will be other intentions coming up and you have to say no to them. Or there sometimes is the tendency to get very still and fall asleep, which is not right concentration. You want to be alert all the time. So it’s a balancing act, alert but very still. Something you have to keep going. You can’t just set it on automatic pilot and sit back and not do anything at all. Because either you’ll drop off into sleep or else you’ll wander around. And you won’t have learned anything about the mind. Because we’re trying to create a state of mind here, which is called “becoming,” bhava. Because we want to understand what it means to create a state of becoming. As I said, the cravings that lead to becoming are the source of suffering. And so we have to know what is this process that the Buddha’s talking about. Basically you have a desire. And then you see the world in which that desired object can be found. And then you take on a role in that world. You take on an identity. This is how we pursue all the things that we desire. We’re going to pursue stillness. You’re going to focus on the breath. You want to stay with the breath. That’s the object. And then the range of your body is the world that’s relevant. And you’re going to be the meditator, looking after this. In the beginning you don’t have to be too self-conscious about this. Just focus on the breath. Make sure the mind stays with the breath. In a way where it can stay alert, interested, but still. But as you get better and better, then you begin to notice. This is how it’s done. You notice the ways in which you create this state of mind. It can also be found outside of concentration. In fact, this is the way we approach anything we desire. As the Buddha said, “All things are rooted in desire.” So this is how we basically approach life. We go for things we desire, and there’s a relevant world. And there’s us. And there’s us in that world. We do this many times in the course of the day. When an ice cream cone, the relevant world is the distance between where you are right now and where the next place of ice cream would be. Whether it’s in your house, in a store. And then the person has to provide the means to get the ice cream. You just walk over to the refrigerator, or drive down to the store and buy it. In which you’ve got the desired object and the mind looks for something else to desire. Sometimes it hasn’t even found its first object and already new desires come up. Which is why we get pulled in all sorts of different directions. You want to see this process clearly. Because as the Buddha said, “Awakening consists of finding something that’s outside of this process, something that’s not fabricated.” In order to recognize that, you have to recognize what you do fabricate really clearly. There are a lot of Vipassana methods which tell you don’t get into concentration. And then when you happen to stumble into concentration, they interpret it as being something that’s not concentration at all. Because they haven’t learned how to really observe carefully how the mind creates a state. So I think they’ve gained awakening when it’s just another level of concentration. Or blanking out. Again, you can will yourself to blank out. And for the amount of time that you’re in that blank state, you don’t know anything. But that’s not awakening. If that were awakening, the Buddha wouldn’t have called it awakening. Call it the big sleep. We want to get to know our mind. So when we finally find something that really is unfabricated, something that really is the ultimate happiness, we’ll recognize it for what it is. And we’ll be able to trust our judgment on that. In the text they talk about the opening of the Dhamma-I or the gaining of the Dhamma-I. It’s always the same phrase. Whatever is subject to origination is all subject to cessation. Now this phrase occurs to you only when you find something that’s not subject to origination and doesn’t cease. You look back on everything else you’ve experienced up to that point and you realize, okay, it’s all subject to origination. The word origination doesn’t simply mean arising. It means something that’s caused. And the cause comes from within the mind. So much comes out of our minds that we’re not conscious of. And that’s one of the revelations of the Dhamma-I. It’s just how much we are shaping our experience, even as simple as receiving input through the senses. It has to be an act of the mind that goes out to the senses in order to pick those things up. But we do this so much all the time that we hardly notice it. We take it for granted. But as you get the mind into concentration and you start peeling away with levels of stress, they get more and more subtle, you finally reach something that opens everything up in a new way. And you look back and you say, well, everything up to this point has been subject to origination, i.e., it’s been shaped by the mind. This is not shaped by the mind. Things that are shaped by the mind will pass away, but this is not going to pass away, because it’s outside of time. If something were in time, it could pass away, but this is not. So that’s where we’re going. And although we shouldn’t focus too much attention on where we’re going, we’re going to focus on what our next step is, still it gives us an idea that this is a good place to go. Something that’s totally free. Total freedom, total happiness. Totally harmless. We think about that as a possibility, then we look at our other choices in life, and it changes the equation. There’s so many pleasures in life that you say, well, this is as good as it gets, so I might as well enjoy this, I might as well just content myself with what I’ve got. But the Buddha’s saying there’s something better. And you always want to keep that in mind. Otherwise you’ll settle for ordinary things. And what do ordinary things do? Well, they’re inconstant and they’re stressful, and they’re not totally under your control. Do you really want to base your happiness on something like that? If that’s all we had in life, then you could choose whatever pleasures you found appealed to you, and nobody could say they were bad. But when there’s this opportunity to put a total into suffering, there’s a dimension in the mind where it can be contacted at the mind that’s totally limitless. Keep that in mind. So when you choose your actions as you go through the day, you’ll have a good standard to measure them against. Are these things really worth it? The Buddha said he got on the right path and was able to divide his thoughts into two types. One, those that were based on sensuality, ill will, harmfulness. He says those would lead to affliction, and they would get in the way of nirvana. So already he had a high standard. He wanted to choose actions that were harmless, and not get in the way of the ultimate happiness. As for thoughts that were in doubt of renunciation, non-ill will, harmlessness, those didn’t afflict anybody, and they didn’t get in the way of full awakening, of true peace, true freedom. Those thoughts, he said, you could allow them to run. Although they would, if you taught them for 24 hours, wear out the mind. So he brought the mind to rest. Like we’re doing right now, getting the mind to settle down. Because it’s when it’s settled down that it can see itself clearly. And it’s settled down with a good thing, so it’s easy to watch. So you have to know this part of the mind really well, the part that’s adjusting things in the present moment. Different kinds of fabrication, bodily fabrication, the way you breathe, mental fabrication, feelings and perceptions, verbal fabrication, the way you talk to yourself. You have to know these things really well. So when they finally fall away, you’ll know for sure that this is something new, something special, something that is not subject to origination. And that’s the experience that allows you to cut away a lot of the fetters that hold the mind back. The primary one being doubt about the Buddha, doubt about the teachings, doubt about your ability to follow them. You see that you can. And the Buddha was right, this really is the ultimate happiness. That fetter is gone. So how do we get there? Like we’re doing right now, focusing on the breath. Try to keep the mind alert and still and mindful all at the same time. So we can begin to understand what’s going on inside.

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