

Unfabricated Happiness

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When the Buddha taught breath meditation, he started out with four very simple steps. You discern long breathing, you discern short breathing, you try to breathe in and out aware of the entire body. Then, in the fourth step, he introduced a technical term, fabrication, or *sankhara*: You try to breathe in and out calming bodily fabrication. That's another word for the in-and-out breath.

The question is, why did he use that technical term? You see it again in the next four steps. First you try to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture, any sense of refreshment that you feel while you're sitting here. Try to focus on that, let it spread throughout the body. Then breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure, a sense of ease. Then he says to breathe in and out sensitive to mental fabrication, which are feelings and perceptions. Now you're already dealing with feelings, and in particular, that feeling of ease. And then there's the step of breathing in and out calming mental fabrication.

So again, why did he use the technical term? The answer is that the Buddha's trying to get you to think in terms of fabrication. In general, fabrication means things that are put together, processes that put things together. But specifically, the term refers what you're doing to fabricate your own experience. Input comes into the senses and you don't receive it with everything already identified as to what's what, what's important, and what's not. You have to do the identification: That's perception. You have to do the evaluating: That's more fabrication. In these ways you shape your experience. We play a much bigger role in that shaping than we tend to think, and the Buddha wants you to get sensitive to that role. For instance, simply the way you intend to breathe—consciously or unconsciously—is going to have an impact on how you experience the body. The feelings you focus on, the perceptions you use, are going to have an impact on the mind.

Then there's a third kind of fabrication, called verbal fabrication, where you talk to yourself. That plays a role in the instructions to the meditation themselves: things you tell yourself, such as, "I'm going to breathe this way, I'm going to

breathe that way, I'm going to focus on this, focus on that as I breathe in and out." And the Buddha wants you to calm that fabrication. This helps you gain a sense of how the way you normally fabricate things causes a lot of unnecessary stress and suffering. The more stirred-up your fabrications, the more you're going to suffer: one, simply out of the effort to put these things together, and two, you come up with all kinds of ideas, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, that can wreak a lot of havoc on the mind. When the mind is punishing itself this way, it's going to suffer, and the punishment doesn't stop there. It spreads out to other people.

So follow the Buddha's instructions. Try to get sensitive to how the way you breathe has an impact on the body, and use the breath in a way that feels soothing, gives rise to feelings of pleasure, gives rise to feelings of refreshment. When the body's been energized, then you can allow it to grow calm.

At the same time, look at the perceptions you're holding in mind right now. What kind of perception do you have of the breath? If you think of it simply as air coming in and out through the nostrils, it's going to be hard to use the breath to help spread those feelings of ease and well-being around the body. But if you think of the breath as a flow of energy—after all, the muscles have to move, the body has to move so that the air can come in and out of the lungs—well, what is that movement? It's breath energy. Where does it come from? Where does it originate in the body? And as you feel that movement spreading through the body, does it feel good or does it feel constricted? Try to become sensitive to these things so that you can use the breath energy skillfully.

We're perfectly free to breathe anyway we want. So why let yourself breathe in a way that's creating unnecessary stress? The usual reason is because you're not paying attention. You've got other things you think are more important. But here again, the Buddha's pointing your attention to how the way you breathe is going to have an impact on your mood. Your mood, of course, is going to have an impact on the things you do and say and think. So it's wise to get sensitive to this aspect of your experience, to get more and more sensitive to how you really are shaping things, to see the potentials you have here, and how you can make the best use of them.

We focus on fabrication because ultimately we're looking for an unfabricated

pleasure, something you don't have to put together. But you won't really know the unfabricated until you've gotten very sensitive to how you fabricate your experience of the present moment. It's not that everything is served to you ready-made, already finished. You have to put things together. You have to put the finishing touches on them so that they become a coherent experience. The mind is active in its creation of the present moment. We don't create it totally out of whole cloth. Some things do come in from our past actions, but when the Buddha explains the list of causes for suffering, the input from the senses—which is what comes from your past actions—comes after this process of fabrication.

The way you fabricate your experience, if you do it in ignorance, already primes you to suffer from that experience, regardless of the input from the senses. If you fabricate with knowledge, that fabrication and everything following from it becomes a path to the end of suffering. And the more sensitive you get as you fabricate a good path here—in other words, a good state of concentration, mindful, alert, ardent—the more you can develop a sense of ease that you can spread through the body. You get a sense of refreshment you can spread through the body. You spread your awareness through the body. Your sensitivity develops and grows. Things that used to strike you as okay suddenly feel a bit too stressful. You begin to notice, more and more, how you're shaping things and how there's stress in the shaping. And you look at why.

Why are you creating the stress? Well, there's desire, and as the Buddha said, not all desires are bad. Some desires, when you engage in them with knowledge, can be part of the path. But often our desires are ignorant and they fuel our fabrication in lots of ways that are conflicting, afflicting. As you get more sensitive here, you begin to wonder why you get engaged. Why create these things? After all, you're not simply on the receiving end. You're creating these things, and then you're suffering from them.

When you see that the suffering coming from these things is not nearly worth the allure that makes you want to create them to begin with, then you feel dispassion. Dispassion then allows these processes of fabrication to fall away because passion was what was driving them. When these processes fall away, then something unfabricated can appear. It's always there, but we're too busy to see it,

busy creating our fabrications as to what we want here, what we want there, what we think this is, what we think that is, and if it's not what we want it to be, what can we do to make it what we want it to be? That kind of stuff. That's always getting in the way. But when you stop that process, then something outside of processes, outside of time, appears in the mind. And that's the ultimate happiness, that's the unfabricated.

I've known people who ask, "How can we as conditioned beings find something unfabricated?" But they're assuming that we're conditioned by something totally outside of our control: either a creator god or just material laws, physical laws. But the Buddha's analysis is that, no, we're creating the present moment on our own initiative using the raw materials, as I said, that come from the past, pointing the present moment in different directions. And because we're creating it, we can take it apart. Because we can take it apart, that's when we can find something that's not fabricated.

This afternoon we talked about the image of happiness as being like a roller-coaster, going up and down, and up and down, and then thinking of nibbana as getting to the up and then not going down again. But it's not. It's actually beyond the up. Wherever there's up, there's going to be down. The roller-coaster is in space and time. The happiness of nibbana, the well-being of nibbana, the bliss—all that's covered by one word in Pali, happiness, bliss, well-being, pleasure, the word is *sukha*: That's not dependent on anything in time; it's not dependent on anything fabricated; it's not dependent on anything at all, which is why it doesn't change. It's in a different dimension, but it can be contacted here at the mind, when the mind stops its fabrication.

So listen to the Buddha's instructions. He's showing you that even the way you breathe is fabricating your experience of the body, and your experience of the body is going to have an impact on feelings. Those feelings are going to have an impact on the mind. The way you talk to yourself, the perceptions you hold in mind as you identify this as this and that as that, what you want out of this and want out of that: Try to get sensitive to all these things, to see where they're placing unnecessary stress on the mind. The more you can get sensitive to different levels of stress, the more you'll be able to unravel the process of fabrication to that

point of awakening where the unfabricated appears.

As the Buddha said, it's true happiness, harmless happiness, blameless happiness—one of those rare forms of happiness that really is more than worth the effort that goes into finding it, both for your own well-being and the well-being of people around you.