

## *Sensitive to Fabrication*

*February 6, 2016*

Take a couple of good long deep in-and-out breaths. Notice where you feel the breathing and how it feels. You know consciously that there's air coming in and out at the nose, but there's more to the breathing process than that. There's a flow of energy that goes through the body, expanding the rib cage so that air can come in and go out. The air is not doing the breathing. The body's doing the breathing. And it's the body's doing of the breathing that we want to pay attention to. So when the impulse comes to breathe in, where does it start? Different people will sense it in different places, and often as your mind settles down, you'll get more and more sensitive to where that impulse starts, to how it flows through the body, and to whether it's flowing well or not. The parts of the body that seem to be tense that you can relax, allow them to relax, while at the same time maintaining your erect posture. Think of the breath energy flowing throughout the whole body, through all the nerves, through all the blood vessels, out to every pore.

What you're trying to do here is to get to where you can be aware of the whole body with a sense of ease, a sense of being connected, so that you're happy to stay here. Otherwise, if there are little impulses here and there, little knots of energy that get tied up, the mind tends to run with those and go off someplace else because it doesn't like being here.

And that can be for any number of reasons. One is simple boredom. You don't see anything happening right here and you want to make up a good story to keep the mind entertained. Or you actually have some serious business to take care of. But for the time being, none of that counts, no matter how serious the business. What you're doing now as you meditate is more serious because you need to know this area of your awareness, this sense of the breath energy flowing in and out of the body as you breathe in and breathe out. As the Buddha said, if you're ignorant of this, this can become a cause for suffering.

In his explanations for the steps that lead up to craving and then from craving into suffering, there's something called fabrication. What's interesting about fabrication is that it comes before your consciousness. It's how you prime yourself to sense things. If you're ignorant of this fabrication, your consciousness can lead to all the other links in the process leading to suffering. But if you bring knowledge to this process, it turns all those links into part of the path.

Now, when we're focused on the breath, we're in touch with all the different kinds of fabrication. There are three in all. There's bodily fabrication, which is the

in-and-out breath itself; verbal fabrication, what the Buddha calls directed thought and evaluation. To put that in simple terms, it's the mind's conversation with itself: all the voices of the committee; all the various members of the committee that get in on the conversation. You bring a topic to the committee, and everybody talks about it, passes judgment on it, gives recommendations, asks questions. That inner conversation can prime you to suffer a lot if you're not careful. Then there are mental fabrications, which are feelings of pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain, together with perceptions: the labels you apply to things. Sometimes these labels are conscious and sometimes they're very unconscious.

As we focus on the breath, we're dealing directly with all three types of fabrication. You've got the in-and-out breath as your object. You've got your committee here talking about the breath and how well you're staying with the breath. Some committee members will say, "Hey, listen, think about something else." You've got to talk to them in a way that brings everything back, either banishing them outside the wall or trying to win them over with a sense of ease in the breath. It depends on the situation. Then there's the feeling of ease that comes as you begin to settle in with the breath. The steadier your awareness, the smoother the breath becomes. Finally, there's the perception you hold in mind about what's happening as you breathe: where the breath energy comes in; how it moves.

There you are. You've got all those types of fabrication and you're trying to get more and more conscious of them. You can see if any one of them is conducive to suffering or to craving, and you can change it—because the difference between whether this is going to be an experience of suffering or not, as the Buddha said, is whether you apply the four noble truths to what you're doing. And your applying the four noble truths is not just remembering what the words say. It's a series of questions. It's a problem-solving attitude. "Where's the unnecessary stress here? What are you doing to cause it? What can you do to stop it?" Those are the questions that lie behind the noble truths. In particular: "What are you clinging to?"

That passage we chanted just now has an unusual phrase, the very first one: "those who don't discern suffering." Everybody discerns suffering—but not clearly. All too often you hear people say, "The Buddha taught that life is suffering." He never said that. He said something a lot more precise. He went through the different aspects of life that are suffering. Aging is suffering. Illness is suffering. Death is suffering. You can't argue with that. Not getting what you want is suffering. Having to be with things you don't like, having to be separated

from those that you do like: That's suffering, too. Those are all examples. But what lies at the heart of suffering, he says, is clinging to the five aggregates. To see that is to discern suffering.

Again, you've got the aggregates right here. They sound foreign. The word *aggregate* is an unfortunate translation of the Pali word *khandha*, which means "heap." But even though the word is foreign, the actual heaps or aggregates are right here. The first aggregate is the form of the body. Okay, you've got the form of the body sitting right here. Feelings: You've got the feelings of ease or dis-ease right here. Perceptions: the labels you're applying as you keep the breath in mind, they're right here. Fabrication, the directed thought and evaluation: That's right here. And consciousness: It's here, too. If you cling to any of these things in an unskillful way, it's going to cause suffering. So ask yourself how you're clinging in an unskillful way right here.

For the time being, you do want to hold onto the concentration. That's nothing you want to let go of. We were talking today about how when you hear about jhana, it used to be they would tell you about jhana and then immediately tell you it was dangerous and tell you not to go there, which is not what the Buddha said. You never find anyplace where the Buddha said jhana's dangerous. The only danger, he said, is that you get there and you get a little bit lazy about moving on because you like it so much. But that danger is easily overcome, especially when compared to the danger of not having jhana, not having good solid concentration. Because in that case, you go for sensuality, and people kill one another over sensuality. That's why we have wars. That's why we have crazy politics. Nobody's killed anybody else over jhana. Even though they have jhana wars, nobody dies.

So you want to hold on to a good state of concentration; hold on to the pleasure that comes from the concentration so that you can look at your other forms of clinging and see that they're really not worth the effort because you've got something better here. There's clinging to sensuality: the mind's fascination with thinking about how good this or that sensual pleasure's going to be; and then remembering how good it was. Think about how much people dress up their sensual pleasures to make them seem worthwhile. The reason we do that is because we think that the only alternative to sensual pleasure is pain. But here the Buddha's offering us something better, a better pleasure: the pleasure that comes from sitting here with the mind very still and very balanced with a sense of the energy in the body flowing evenly and smoothly throughout; and your awareness allowed to spread so it's not confined to one little spot. You'll be aware of the whole body. Once you have this, it's a lot easier to look at the way you dress up

sensual pleasures and realize they're not really worth it. You gain some distance from them.

The same with the other forms of clinging. There's clinging to views; clinging to habits and practices—in other words, having the idea that this has to be done that way and that has to be done this way, without any real consideration of what are the real effects of doing it this or that way. Clinging to views in the sense that, “Having this view makes me a better person; or just having the right view about something will make God like me,” or whoever is passing judgment on things. You can begin to see that a lot of views that we cling to, a lot of the ways we do things, are actually harmful. Having a good state of concentration helps you to step back from those things.

Of course, we have views for the path. But then we use these views consciously as tools, not as ends in themselves. We've also got the habits or the precepts, along with the practices of meditation. These, again, are tools. They're not meant to be ends in and of themselves. These are more skillful forms of clinging that you hold on to in order to let go of the grosser ones. And even your sense of self: You're the meditator here. You've got reasons for being here to meditate. And as long as you need to have that sense of yourself as the meditator, who wishes yourself well, wishes other beings well, and you're doing this for your sake and for the sake of others: That sense of self is a healthy one to develop.

There's a practice in concentration. We're not fully letting go of clinging. Instead, we're developing better clings strategically so that we can let go of the unskillful ones. The forest ajaans have an analogy for this. They say it's like climbing a ladder. You hold onto one rung with one hand. Then you reach up to the next one with the other hand. And only when you've held on tightly to that second one can you let go of the first one and then reach higher with the first hand up to a third rung, higher up. And so on up the ladder. In other words, the clinging gets higher and higher, more and more refined.

We're not here to clone awakening. We're here to take steps to get there. The path doesn't cause awakening, but it does take you there. Ultimately, when you get to the top of the ladder—say you're climbing to the roof—then when you're on the roof, then you can let go of the ladder and you're safe. But if, on your way up, you let go with both hands, you're going to fall.

You hold on to the concentration so that you can let go of things that are more harmful. And you're getting very conscious of this level of awareness that has an impact on your consciousness: how you see things, how you listen to things, how you smell and taste and touch things, how you think about things. They're always shaped by these factors: the way you breathe; the way you talk to

yourself inside; and the feelings and perceptions that shape your mind state. So try to bring knowledge to this. Get so that you really discern what's going on here: asking the right questions so that you come to the right answers—answers that really do put an end to suffering. There are a lot of the questions in the world that don't have a real answer, or else they do have answers, but the answers are no help at all in putting an end to suffering. But this question has a very clear answer if you develop the skills on how to get to know this area of your awareness and use it so that it's actually a part of the path to the end of suffering. Once you know this area, it helps you as you're living—and even when death comes.

There will be a lot of urges going in different directions at that time, and you want to be as conscious as possible of what's happening as you realize you can't stay here anymore. As the Buddha points out, your consciousness doesn't have to depend on the body. It can depend on clinging and craving. Just as you go from one dream to another, it all happens right here: Your sense of "right here" stays right here. Even though, as in a dream, your sense of right here in one dream changes into something else in the next dream, but you always have the feeling of being right here. But the world around "right here" will change. The same thing happens as you leave this body and go to the next one. And these same processes are involved: your internal dialogue, along with the feelings and perceptions that underlie it.

You want to make sure these processes are well trained so that you can choose what you want to think about and what you don't want to think about. This, as the Buddha said, is one of the skills you develop as you meditate. Something comes up in the mind and you don't want to think about it, you have the skill not to think about it. You can drop it—and *really* drop it, not just push it underground. If something is worth thinking about, you can think about it. The Buddha's not teaching us to be totally blank. He's just putting us in control. We're no longer a slave to these things because we're not operating under ignorance. We see clearly what's going on. We can shape it in the direction, point it in the direction, we want. It's when you can do that that the mind is well trained. And, as the Buddha said, it's the well trained mind that brings happiness.