

Scribe Knowledge, Warrior Knowledge

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Many of us are like that man who was described as living his life at a safe distance from his own body. We use our body, we're with the body, and yet for some reason we're apart from it. We can block it out very easily. The times when we're forced to be aware of it, we find that it's painful, which makes us want to block it out all the more. But the mind, when it's blocking things out that way, is hiding huge areas of itself from itself as well, and it doesn't have a good solid grounding in the present moment. Without that grounding and without having a sense of well-being in the body, you can end up doing anything, saying anything, thinking anything, because you're not coming from a position of strength.

One of the reasons we meditate is to get the mind back into the body. It may take a while, but we don't just sit here and put up with the pains. We can develop some tools so that we can get back into the body and feel comfortable being here.

This is why we work with the breath—not only the in-and-out breath but also the other breath energies throughout the body. Just learning how to think about the body in those terms is useful. It's not a solid lump of tension here; you've got some energy flowing around. Without that energy, the body couldn't function at all.

And so we're trying to get in touch with that: just the feeling of being here with the body and finding the areas that we can make comfortable. Think of Ajaan Lee's image: You're going into a house where some of the floorboards are rotten, so you make sure you don't step on them. If you're going to lie down, you certainly don't lie down there. You lie down in the areas where the floorboards are sound. In the same way, try to find an area of the body that you can make comfortable by the way you breathe. It might be in the center of the body, or you might have to start out at the periphery, working from the hands and the feet on in—whatever seems to work best for the body, so that you have a grounding here with a sense of well-being. Give the mind some pleasure to feed off of, because the mind is constantly feeding. As the Buddha said, the feeding is related to suffering, because suffering is clinging, and the term for “feeding” or “taking sustenance” is also the same as the word for “clinging.”

But the Buddha thought strategically. He realized that you couldn't just stop feeding off of form, feelings, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness. If you forced yourself to stop, parts of the mind would come sneaking out for a midnight snack. You've got to give the mind a good source of food inside. And when the

Buddha's talking about food in terms of the practice, concentration is the main food. Learning how to be steadily with the body with a sense of well-being gives you the strength to perform all the other tasks of the path.

So always remember that. The Buddha thought strategically. In the ancient world, they made a distinction between "scribe knowledge" and "warrior knowledge." The Buddha's knowledge is "warrior knowledge." It's aimed at attaining a certain goal, and using whatever strategies are needed to get there. Unfortunately, a lot of what we learn about the Dhamma has been filtered through scribes—not only the people who copied down the texts but also the people who commented on them and tried to develop a philosophy around them that was very much a scribe-like philosophy.

I've been reading a couple books recently on the noble eightfold path written by people trained in the scholarly tradition, and their approach is very strange. Consciousness, they say, is basically passive. It has a map of reality, but its map of reality is all wrong. It thinks it has a permanent self. And so when things arise, it goes from its passive, pure state into a reactive state, trying to grab onto things for its permanent self. That's why it suffers. If it didn't think in terms of self, it wouldn't suffer. So they teach you to be non-reactive, to have no judgments, just try to be as nonreactive as possible, as equanimous as possible, until you can see that the Buddha's map, which says there is no permanent self, is the correct map. Once you've confirmed that it's the correct map, then you won't be reactive anymore, and that's the end of the problem. You can see that this is a scribe-like way of thinking about things, in terms of definitions and maps of reality.

Warriors use maps, too, but they use them in a different way, for a different purpose. They use the map to gain something else beside the map. They're not there just to confirm that the map is true. When the Buddha looks at how the mind acts, he sees that it requires strategy to train it. We cling to things, not because we have a false idea that they're permanent, but because we feel that whatever effort goes into clinging is worth it because of the pleasure we get. We feed off that pleasure. So even if we don't believe that there's a permanent self or that things have a permanent essence, we still cling to them as long as we see that it's worth the effort that goes into clinging to them.

The Buddha's ultimate judgment, of course, is that, no, it's not worth the effort. But he doesn't tell you simply to stop holding onto things; he gives you progressively better things to hold onto before you can fully let go. You hold onto the practice of virtue, you hold onto the practice of concentration, you hold onto discernment as your tools. And you feed off the well-being that these things can provide. In this way, he gives you an alternative source of food. And when you're

better fed—the mind is not so worked up around things—ultimately it gets to where it can see an opening to a happiness inside that doesn't require feeding. Only then can you stop having to feed. It's not a matter of telling yourself, "Gee, my stomach is impermanent, and food is impermanent, therefore I'll just stop eating." You're going to have to eat as long as there's a body and as long as there's a mind functioning. But there is this happiness inside that's unfabricated, that doesn't need to feed, but you attain it through a fabricated path. This is the strategic part of the Buddha's teaching. You have to develop certain qualities that eventually you'll put aside.

This is why the duties of the path fall into two steps: The first is that you develop the path so it does its work. The second step comes when the path has been fully developed and done its work: That's when you finally let it go. Ajaan Mun expresses this by saying that you start with the four noble truths. Actually prior to that you start with mundane right view, which is a belief in kamma, action, and that moves into the four noble truths. After all, craving, the cause of suffering, is an unskillful form of action. The path is a skillful form of action. The path is a type of kamma. But it's a special type of kamma: kamma leading to the end of kamma. It's also a special type of fabrication because it gets you to the unfabricated. But you have to develop it first. Only when it's developed and it's done its work, that's when you let it go.

We talk about the four noble truths because there are four duties: Stress is to be comprehended, its cause is to be abandoned, its cessation is to be realized, and the path to its cessation is to be developed. But then, as in Ajaan Mun's comment, the four truths collapse into one, with just one duty: the duty of letting go.

So we're fabricating a path but it will lead us to the unfabricated, which means that you can't just clone awakening. You can't pretend that you don't need to feed. You *do* need to feed. So feed well. Find a source of food that, unlike most pleasures of the world, doesn't involve any bad kamma and also doesn't involve clouding the mind. When the mind gets concentrated, you can see things clearly, and in particular, see what's going on inside the mind. That puts you in a position where you can see where and how the mind is causing itself unnecessary suffering.

The Buddha's image is of a man standing at the edge of a pool, and the water in the pool is still and clear, so he can see everything happening there in the pool. In the same way, when the mind gets concentrated with a sense of well-being, it calms down. Still and clear. Once it's been well fed by pleasure and rapture, it can let the pleasure and rapture go, and then go with just the subtle pleasure of equanimity. That's when it can see things clearly inside. Because this equanimity is different from the equanimity of just saying, "Well, things don't matter." That's

what's called "householder equanimity" and it's involved with suffering. You've pretty much given up on the idea that the aggregates can provide any happiness, so you just say, "Well, I'll just give up on the idea of happiness and try to find some peace in being equanimous."

The Buddha was not a warrior who gave up. He found that we can turn these aggregates into the path, as when we're doing concentration. You've got the body here: That's form. The breath: That's form. You've got the feeling of pleasure that comes from staying with the breath. There are perceptions that hold you with the breath and allow the breath energy to get more evenly spread throughout the body with a sense of well-being. There are fabrications—directed thought and evaluation—and there's consciousness. You've got all the aggregates right here. But you're not just saying, "Gee, these aggregates are impermanent, so I'll let them go." You use them. In the Buddha's image, you bind them together. You make a raft out of them, and then, holding onto the raft, you make the effort to go across to the other side. Once you've got to the other side, then you can put the raft aside.

So the Buddha's not telling you to give up on your hopes for happiness or to give up on the aggregates. He's just saying that this is how you use them to find a happiness that's really reliable, that doesn't turn into anything else: a happiness where there's no hunger.

So as we practice, we want to take a warrior's approach. We're not here just to believe the Buddha's map. His map is not a map of reality. It's more of a map of processes as they happen: the processes of how the mind creates suffering and how it can use those same processes with knowledge so that it doesn't create suffering. It's a different kind of map, based on the realization that we hold onto things not because we think they're permanent. We hold onto things because we think that the effort of giving rise to them and clinging to them will bring a happiness that's worth the effort. It's a faulty judgment.

The Buddha's simply telling us to use our faculty of judgment more wisely. We don't put judgments aside. We learn to be more discerning about where stress really is, and where real pleasure is, real happiness is. The insights that are going to come are value judgments as to what's worth the effort and what's not. An effort that can take you to a happiness that will then not require any more effort is the best sort of effort of all because it does have an end point.

Otherwise, our awareness, which is not passive, is constantly looking actively for food. If it doesn't have a happiness that doesn't require food, it's going to keep on searching for food. And the problem is to search for food, you've taken on an identity, and to have that identity, you need to feed. It's a vicious cycle. But now

we're taking a different identity as meditators, an identity that will take us to a source of food or a type of nourishment that doesn't require feeding anymore, doesn't require any effort anymore. That's when we can put all our burdens down.

So think like a warrior—a warrior who's headed toward victory and not to a resigned defeat. Because victory is possible and it's worth whatever struggle is required to get there.