

What You Sense Directly

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The Buddha said there are three kinds of kamma: bodily, verbal, and mental. In some passages, when he's talking about the kind of kamma that leads to rebirth, he calls them bodily fabrication, verbal fabrication, and mental fabrication.

But there are also passages in the Canon that talk about bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication in terms of what you experience as you meditate. Bodily fabrication is the breath. Verbal fabrication is directed thought and evaluation, as you talk to yourself about the breath. Mental fabrication is composed of feelings and perceptions. Feelings are the feeling tones you have right here: pleasant, painful, neither pleasant nor painful. Then perceptions are the images you hold in mind that help you stay with the breath—the markers of the mind, the signposts—or the way you visualize to yourself how the breath goes through the body.

So the question is, are those two different types of fabrication—in terms of rebirth and in terms of the meditation—related or not? Scholars like to say that they're not. But what advantage do you gain from saying that? It's more useful to realize that what you're experiencing right now, as you try to put this state of concentration together, is the root of the bodily, verbal, and mental actions that could lead to rebirth. After all, to move your body, you have to breathe. To speak, you have to engage in directed thought and evaluation. And to think, you need feelings and perceptions. Notice that thinking here covers emotions as well.

So you've got the sprouts of those things right here. You can deal with them directly right here. This is one of the whole points of the meditation. If, in order to understand rebirth or kamma, you had to be aware of the entire universe, it would take a long, long time to get there.

The Canon tells a story of a deva with a long stride who tried to stride from one end of the universe to the other and, even after a deva lifetime, didn't make it. The universe is awfully big. But you realize you can go to the different spots of the universe through your actions. And where do your actions come from? These little events right here, right now, the fabrications going on in the body and mind right here, right now.

So you don't have to look anywhere else. Look right here. Be fully sensitive to what you sense right here. It's useful to have a conceptual framework to give you some ideas of where to look, but the actual experience, the raw data, is right here. And you're closest to the real thing as you stay on this level: what the Buddha calls name and form.

I've been reading a book recently saying that all of our language is metaphorical. The metaphors get really deep into our experiences, so deep that it's hard to say that we don't have any experience that hasn't been colored by the metaphors of our language and culture. But there is one experience that is prior to culture, and that's your pain. Of course, how do we conceive the pain to get some idea of how to get rid of it? That's where we start getting engaged in culture. We look around trying to find others to help us. We try to communicate with them, and we have to communicate on their terms. But the pain is raw data.

Fortunately, pleasure is also raw data. When something feels really good, you don't need a cultural overlay or verbal overlay to tell you that it's good, just that some of the overlays may get in the way of appreciating the sense of well-being that you can have right here. This is one of the reasons why Ajaan Mun told his students that when they came to practice with him—especially the ones who had a background in scholarly Buddhism—that they should put their knowledge in the trunk. Seal it away, and just learn how to be right here. Sense right here what's going on right here in terms of cause and effect.

In other words, you don't put *all* of your knowledge away. You have some place in the back of the mind where you know a little bit about the four noble truths: that *dukkha*—stress, pain, suffering—is something you do through your clinging. And the reason you cling is because you crave. But that craving can be put an end to, by developing the path. So you've got unskillful causes, the different kinds of craving, and skillful causes, the different factors of the path, and then the results of those two. That gives you the four noble truths.

That right there is enough, because these truths point you to what you're doing right now and where you may want to look to improve what you're doing. You test the results as to whether what you're doing counts as a cause of suffering or part of the path by the feeling tones you give rise to. Because the path is composed of, among other things, right concentration.

And it's interesting when the Buddha defines different jhanas, he doesn't say the first jhana is accompanied by pleasure or rapture, or the fourth jhana is accompanied by equanimity. He says, "First jhana: pleasure and rapture accompanied by directed thought and evaluation." The pleasure and rapture are the primary parts of the experience, just as the equanimity is a primary part of the experience in the fourth jhana. These are things you feel. These are things you sense.

You have to learn how to get in touch with this level of your awareness and feel at home with it. As you get more and more here, then you begin to have a little bit less trust in your perceptions, the labels you have for things. You give

more and more trust to how things feel directly right here as you watch yourself act and then look at the results. As you stay at this level, then when questions come up as to what to do to get more skillful, you look back on the knowledge you've gained from studying the Dhamma. From this perspective, you're in a much better position to decide what's useful and what's not.

So it's not that you totally discard what you've learned. You just want to move into this new country, the country of how you experience things directly right here. As you try to bring your awareness to the breath in a way where they fit together well, the mind can settle down. It feels so good being here that you don't feel the nervous need to keep on thinking. Think just enough thought to keep you here: the perception of "breath, breath" or "whole body, whole body," whatever holds you here.

As you're here, then you look back on the concepts that you've picked up from reading, studying, listening to the Dhamma, and you see them from a new angle. And you're going to be much closer to seeing them in a way that's really useful.

So this is your touchstone that helps you sort through whatever Dhamma knowledge you have: this touchstone of name and form, right here, right now. And it helps to settle a lot of issues—and to pull you out of a lot of issues as well.

I received a very sad letter today from a guy who is struggling with the teachings on no-self and not-self. He says the idea that the Buddha wants you to put that issue of whether there exists a self, or doesn't exist a self, aside: That's very attractive to him, but before he goes there, he wants to figure out the people who say there is no self. What do they have to say? As he was saying, the more he read, the more confused he got, and the more desperate he was getting, because someone had told him that if you don't understand no-self, then there's no way of gaining liberation. He was getting very depressed. So I wrote back immediately and told him, one, question those people who say that you have to understand no-self to gain liberation—or even just *anatta*, regardless of how you translate it. In the case of the five brethren, the Buddha didn't even bring up the topic until after they had gained stream entry.

You think of all the people who gained awakening from listening to the graduated discourse: It doesn't even end in the three characteristics, it ends with the four noble truths—cause and effect around stress and suffering, and the path to the end of suffering: in other words, looking directly at what you're doing right here, right now. That's where these questions get answered. That's the framework that helps you to answer them.

So look to the concentration as your place to settle in, and from there get the correct viewpoint on right view and all the other things you've learned about the

Dhamma. Because as you're dealing with the realities right here, you begin to see which issues are genuine issues and which are just distractions—or worse than distractions. As the Buddha said, some of them are a tangle of views, a jungle of views, a writhing wilderness of views. Getting the mind comfortable, settled down right here, feeling at home right here helps you to slash your way through the jungle.