

Warrior Knowledge

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There's a constant dialogue going on in the mind: "This is this." "No, it's that." "This should be this." "That should be that; you like this and you don't like that." All kinds of voices – and in many cases the voices are totally untrained. They're just things we've picked up from here or there, and we carry them around. This is the baggage in our mind.

The Buddha said that the mind can be at peace only when it's one, but for most of us there are two, three, four, five, six voices going at it, with all their preconceptions, saying, "You've got to do this, you've got to do that." And unless you examine them, they can force you to suffer in a lot of ways. We hold onto so many things, not so much because we like them but because we're afraid that if we don't hold onto them something even worse is going to happen. We're afraid that if we don't do things this way or that, we're going to get all screwed up. So we hold on and create suffering for ourselves.

This is why, as the mind begins to settle down, one of the big issues you've got to deal with is the range of different voices in the mind that get in the way. Some of them are random, others are more persistent, more pervasive, more persuasive, more in control. You've got to learn how to put a question mark next to them. If anything gets in the way of concentration, put a question mark next to it. "Do you really believe that? Is that kind of thinking really right? Is it really useful?"

That's the main issue: How useful is that kind of thinking? When you start asking this question, you begin to see how much you've been holding onto things you've never really examined in the past. You just accepted them because other people said they were true, or they sounded right, or maybe they worked once, and then you held onto them as a habit. So you have to make it a rule within yourself: An unexamined voice isn't worth listening to.

That's why the Buddha said that there's no jhana without discernment; no discernment without jhana; no solid concentration without understanding; no understanding without solid concentration. The two have to go together. In other words you've got to have at least some understanding of the workings of the mind before you can really settle down. Otherwise you'll fall for all the old tricks the mind's been playing on itself, saying, "You've got to think about this, you've got to get involved in that, you can't neglect this, you've got to look out for that." You need to learn how to see through those voices.

That's what they are: just disembodied voices floating around there in the mind. Learn how to put a question mark next to them, saying, "I wonder if that's

really true? Maybe I can look into it some other time.” Then put the issue aside and go back to work, focusing on the breath. As the mind gets more and more quiet and still, you begin to see these voices more clearly, and other voices that have been hiding out of sight begin to come up to the surface.

This is how these two processes – the stilling and the understanding – help each other. The quieter you are, the more you can see; the more you can see, the more you’re able to cut through the subtle disturbances that keep the mind from being quiet. This is why there’s no such thing as a separate tranquility technique or a separate vipassana technique. Any technique you follow, anything you *will* the mind into focusing on or doing: That’s a concentration technique. You can “do” concentration; you can’t “do” insight. Insight is something that arises as the mind gets still, and often it’s unexpected. You can’t map it out saying, “First you’re going to gain insight into dependent co-arising and then into not-self.” These things vary from person to person – what you happen to notice and question as you’re doing your work.

It’s like the difference between an artisan and an artist. An artisan has a particular technique, a particular craft that he uses, and he may get very good at it, but unless he develops the curiosity that advances his art, he just stays as a craftsman. But if you begin to exercise your ingenuity – “Well, how about trying this? How about trying that?”; questioning this, questioning that; trying this, trying that: That’s when you become an artist. That’s when the art becomes your own. And the same principle applies in the practice. Curiosity and ingenuity make all the difference – when you learn to question your old patterns and test new possibilities.

This is why it’s so important to be able to come out to a quiet, secluded place like this where you can get out of your ordinary ruts, begin to air out the mind, and start questioning the attitudes that seem to work in your daily life. You begin to take them apart and realize that they don’t actually work so well, that they create a lot of unnecessary suffering.

As the Buddha said, simply living as a human being involves pain. There’s the pain of the body, the pain of having to be dependent on things. We have this body that needs sustenance, and in order to gain sustenance we have to work. We have to depend on the work of other people. It’s a real burden for a wide range of people and other living beings – a burden that’s part and parcel with birth, aging, illness, and death. As long as you’re alive, this burden is unavoidable.

But there’s also a lot of suffering that’s totally unnecessary: the things we inflict on ourselves through our own lack of skill in managing our minds. That’s something we can work on in the meditation, learning how to deal more skillfully with issues as they arise, recognizing which patterns of thought are skillful and don’t lead to suffering, which ones are unskillful and do lead to suffering, learning how to stop acting, thinking, and speaking in unskillful ways. That’s what our practice is all about. When we stop doing unskillful things, the

unnecessary suffering we inflict on ourselves will stop. There may be feelings of pain in the body, but there's no suffering in the mind.

So the practice is a matter of developing skill. Ancient cultures made a distinction between two types of knowledge: scribe knowledge and warrior knowledge. Scribe knowledge is the knowledge that can be defined in words. Warrior knowledge is the knowledge that comes from acting, from developing a skill. And even though we need to depend to some extent on scribe knowledge as we meditate, the meditation itself develops warrior knowledge.

We learn the words in the texts so that we can get a basic idea of what the problem is and what needs to be done, but the actual knowledge we're working on comes from developing the mind. In Pali it's called *bhavanamaya-pañña*, the discernment that comes from developing. In other words, as you try to develop concentration in the mind, you begin to realize things about the mind you didn't know before. As you develop mindfulness, as you develop persistence – all these qualities that you work on cultivating – you begin to learn things about the mind that were previously hidden. Obscure. That's the kind of insight, the kind of discernment that's really going to make a difference.

So as you're meditating, think of yourself as a warrior doing battle with ignorance. You're working on a warrior's skill: the survival of the mind with as little suffering as possible. That's what you're working toward. But you have to understand what it means to be an intelligent warrior. People who aren't warriors have picked up a lot of strange ideas about what warriors do, thinking that you have to attack everything as soon as it arises, that you can't give an inch to anyone at all. That's a dumb warrior, a warrior who's going to die young. An intelligent warrior takes on battles only when he realizes he can win them and that they're worth winning.

At the same time a good warrior uses whatever's at hand. We talked today about having to fall back on *buddho* as a "primary-school" meditation technique. Well, if that's what you need, don't be ashamed to use it. A good warrior isn't ashamed to use any weapon that works. Whatever weapons are needed for the battle at hand, those are the ones you've got to use. This is why a good meditator keeps lots of tools, lots of weapons on hand – because when the defilements come, they don't all come in one shape or form. They don't always attack from the same side. Sometimes the mind feels lazy and is very ingenious in thinking of reasons for letting up in the practice. Sometimes it turns on itself and starts browbeating itself for not working harder and harder. Well, that strictness, that sternness, can also be a defilement if it's not helpful for the meditation.

This is when it gets really tricky, for often the voices of defilement can disguise themselves as the voice of the Dhamma. You've got to watch out for that. When you're not quite sure whether what the mind is saying is true or false, skillful or unskillful, just go back to being an observer. Look at the thinking in the mind simply as a process of arising and passing away in which you don't have to get involved. At the very least you'll survive whatever's coming through

the mind; oftentimes you'll have a chance to understand it. You'll begin to see that this goes with that, that goes with this, when you think in this way then this is going to happen, when you think in that way then that's going to happen. When you've seen these connections, then the next time that kind of thinking comes around, you're better armed, better prepared for it.

So as you meditate, you've got lots of techniques. You've got *buddho*, you've got the breath, you've got your ability to analyze things when analysis works, you've got your ability to stay still when it doesn't. In other words, as a meditator you've got to be skilled in lots of approaches, just as a warrior has to be skilled in lots of strategies. What this comes down to is that whatever works in clearing up the suffering of the mind, whatever keeps the mind from creating burdens for itself, whatever technique works: That qualifies as the Dhamma, whether or not it's in the texts, whether or not you heard it from the teacher.

After a while, as you look back on the things that work, you'll find that they fall into patterns, but don't be surprised if the patterns aren't the ones you would have expected beforehand. After all, where do your expectations come from? They come from your past ignorance combined with your past knowledge, all mixed up together. So when all the things you've read in the books don't work, just sit down and look at the problem. Step out of it. Flip it over. Use your ingenuity to find some way around it. If your approach works in alleviating the unnecessary suffering the mind creates for itself, you've found a new side to the Dhamma.

As you stop creating suffering for yourself, you'll find it easier to be skillful and helpful with other people as well. This is why this is not a selfish practice. The principle of goodwill is not just an idle wish, saying, "May all living beings be happy," and then leaving it at that. It also means actually being kind to yourself, not creating the unnecessary suffering that you've been piling on yourself all the time. When you find that your mind is less piled-on like this, it's easier to feel sympathy for other people who are piling burdens on their minds, too. When you're unburdened, it's easier to help them in a genuine way. That's why the benefits of the practice go not only inward but outward as well. Still, the real work has to be done right here inside, finding where those unnecessary burdens are – the burdensome ideas, the burdensome notions the mind piles on itself, saying that it has to react like this, has to think like that. Once you find them, figure out how to let them go. That's the kind of battle you want to take on, the kind that's really worth winning. And when you can win it, your victory is a gift not only to yourself, but also to everyone around you.