

Separate Things Out

May 17, 2014

Tonight's a good night for practicing equanimity. They're not going to stop the music, but you're not going to give in. Sit here and let everything just go right through. You don't have to put up any resistance. And basically, the music is none of your business. The sound waves come up here and they're just going to go traveling further on. You know what Ajahn Chah said: It's not the sound that's bothering you, you're bothering the sound, commenting on it. So just put those comments aside.

And don't put up any *physical* resistance. Think of breath filling the whole body, and the body as very spacious. It's made up of atoms that are mostly space, so there's a lot of space for the sound waves to go through. Try to hold that perception in mind. It helps with a lot of issues, including pain. When pain comes up in the body, there's a very strong sense that the mind will clasp a perception on it that gives it a shape – that gives it solidity, makes it totally impermeable. So you want to undo that perception.

When Ajahn Maha Boowa talks about separating the pain from the body, he's advising that you separate that sense of the pain being one with the earth element. That's the element we tend to hold on to, because that's the one that seems the most solid and heaviest and puts up the most resistance.

So remember, earth is one thing and the pain is something else. When you don't glom the two together, you begin to see that the pain slips around. It's almost like quicksilver. If you were to ask yourself, where is the strongest point of the pain, it moves. First it's here, then it's there. If you start chasing it around, you're no longer the victim. You're taking a proactive role. That requires a fair amount of concentration, but even when your concentration is not strong, you can try it and see if you get some results. Often, the problem is the perception you hold in mind. If you learn how to hold a useful perception in mind, it changes the whole nature of how you experience the pain. It's there, and you're not trying to push it out. What you try to change is your perception, because the perception is what creates the bridge into how you cause suffering in the mind.

So where there's earth, just let it be earth; where there's liquid, just let it be liquid; where there's space, just let it be space, and so on with all the other elements. When you focus on the physical elements, let the pain move around as it likes. Just be sure that you don't connect or glom the two types of sensations together. Solidity is one thing; pain is something else.

This is one of the reasons why the Buddha makes a distinction between those two aggregates. The same applies to all the other aggregates. The perception is one thing, the feeling is something else. The fabrications, the things you build up out of your perceptions, are a separate activity, too. The awareness that's aware of these things is something separate, too. This is an important point: to see these things as something separate. If you catch yourself connecting one aggregate with another right now, just think, "Okay, *drop* that perception."

Try to keep things open, with gaps between them, so they don't gang up on you. This way the awareness can be here, and it can be in the midst of all kinds of things that would ordinarily distract you, irritate you, and yet you can realize that the distraction and irritation don't come

from those things. They come from the mind's tendency to want to have this thing be just this way, and that thing that way, and when they're not that way you get all upset. On an even deeper level, you put things together in a way that, when you've put them together, they bite you.

So, try to separate them out. Feeling is one thing; form is something else. Perceptions, the labels you put on things, are something else. Fabrications are something else, the act of consciousness is something else. See if you can detect the distinctions among them so that this big lump of suffering here gets divided up and, once it gets divided up, it's a lot easier to deal with.

It's like facing a large job. If you think about how big it is, it overwhelms you. It's so big that you can't do anything at all. But if you divide it up into little chores—this little job today, another little job tomorrow, bit by bit by bit—the job gets done. It's not overwhelming. The same with this big lump of suffering here: If you can divide it up into the form and the feeling, or the feelings and the senses of form, the different properties that make up the form, you'll see that even just between the feelings and the form, there's a difference. They're different *kinds* of things. The perceptions that put labels on them: Those are different kinds of things too. They're not glommed together on their own. *You're* the one who gloms them together.

So try to develop a sense of spaciousness around these things. Think of the aggregates as being like atoms, little tiny bits of matter with lots of space. It makes them a lot easier to deal with. A lot less overwhelming.

This is one of the ways in which doing a little analysis first can help with the concentration. This is one of the themes that Ajaan Mun emphasized over and over again. It's not that you first work on your precepts and then move on to concentration when the precepts are mastered, and then wait until the concentration is mastered to work on discernment. Sometimes you have to use discernment to help with the precepts or concentration to help the precepts or your discernment to help your concentration. These things have to help one another along.

Sometimes, when the mind is not quite ready to settle down or there's some issue is nagging you, use a little of your knowledge about what the Buddha taught about the four noble truths or about the five aggregates, and see if that knowledge can help clear up at least a little bit of the burden that comes from having wrong view.

This is one of the reasons why we suffer so much in our practice: Our views are wrong and we carry our wrong views into our concentration. We carry our wrong views into the practice and then wonder why we suffer. There are times when you can simply put a wrong view aside and not really think about it, and then get the mind concentrated, but other times you've really got to fix the wrong view first—such as the view that, say, the pain and the part of the body that's pained are the same thing. They may be in the same space, but actually they're on different frequencies.

It's like that image we talked about this morning: the radio waves going right through us right here, right now. They're all there: waves from San Diego, Los Angeles, Tijuana, and places farther afield. If you can ferret out a particular frequency and block out the rest, you can hear what that radio station has to offer. If you change the frequency a little bit, you get another station and can block out the first. It's the same with the physical elements and your mental aggregates. They're on different frequencies. They may be in the same space, but they don't have to be glommed together. If you glom them together, it's like trying to listen to two or three different radio stations all at once: It's just going to be a cacophony. But if you separate them

out and say this is this station and that is that station and you decide to focus on one or the other, excluding the others that you're not listening to, then they're not nearly as bothersome.

Once you can separate the physical elements from the feeling and from the perception and from the awareness, you can sit there and just *be* with them. You don't need to try to stop them. If you try to stop them, that just creates craving for non-becoming, which creates another identity, another form of suffering. We usually put things together because we like the forms of becoming that arise when we put things together. But then again, when they're assembled into things, they can turn around and bite you. You've created monsters.

So it's good to learn how to separate these things on their own. You're not trying to destroy them. Just let them separate them out. Notice that these things are different types of things, they occupy the same space but they're at different frequencies. When you don't listen to them all at once, they don't cause all that dissonance.

This is how you avoid that paradox in the teachings on becoming: that the desire for becoming is a cause of suffering, but the desire for no-becoming is a cause of suffering, too. So what do you do? The Buddha says you look at things "as they've come to be." That means instead of your constant fabricating this and fabricating that, you just let things arise on their own and you watch them and they do their thing on their own and then they pass away on their own, because you haven't glommed them together. If you've glommed them together, then you've got to take them apart, which involves both craving for becoming, and craving for no-becoming. But if you can allow these things simply to arise and then you notice them arise, *pt-pt-pt-pt*, and pass away on their own, you don't have to go out and snuff them out. Things lighten up considerably inside.

This is one of the ways to use your powers of analysis to get into states of concentration. You can also use them to allow the concentration to dissolve away as well, without you're having to take on the role of being either the creator or the destroyer. On that end of the practice, the Buddha talks in very paradoxical terms about neither staying in place nor moving. When the mind has a sense of place, something that it should be focusing on, and if it loses what it's focusing on, where does it go? It moves somewhere else. It may go from one level of concentration—saying, "That's not really good, I want something more subtle"—and it *moves* to another one.

But there comes a point when you realize that no matter where you go, no matter where you stay, there's going to be suffering. So, what do you do? *Let things fall apart on their own.* Things will arise, but they can fall apart on their own. *Your job is simply that you don't put them together.* Don't create a place out of them. When there's no places, there's neither here nor there.

So this ability to analyze things, allow them to be separate, helps you to get into concentration and also to get beyond concentration. It's a very useful skill.