

The Heat of Six Suns

July 22, 2016

Close your eyes, watch your breath.

Let the mind settle down; let the mind cool down.

It's going to be a hot day. There are fires raging off to the west, but make sure you can put out the fires in your own mind.

As the Buddha said, your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your body, your mind are all on fire. It's as if we each have six suns apiece. The heat of the one sun out there up in the sky is bad enough, but if you've got the heat of the suns in your eyes, in your ears burning things, everything that comes in gets put on fire.

When the mind goes out, it gets put on fire as well. It's the one that's setting fire to things. So see if you can cool it down and put out the fires.

That's what concentration is for, what discernment is for: to get a sense of dispassion for the things that get you worked up, so that you can step away from them and see that the problem is not with them, the problem is in your own mind: the way you perceive things, the way you latch onto things, the stories the mind tells itself about what it wants out there, what it doesn't like about what's out there.

The reason we get upset by what's out there is that we're trying to feed on what's out there. Often we gobble down things that are hot. If we weren't gobbling anything down, the heat could be out there and it wouldn't be affecting us at all. So look inside your mind to see what you're trying to gobble down right now. See if you can step away and say, "I don't need that. I've got better food, cool food, the food of concentration."

This is one of the reasons why we work on developing a sense of ease and well-being with the concentration, so that the mind has its own food inside, its own sense of strength inside. That way it doesn't need all that hot stuff outside. It doesn't need to set itself on fire.

So think of the water that cools down the plants. Have some water in your own mind to cool things down. As for the heat outside, it's just doing its own thing.

There are cold days and there are hot days. It's too bad that we can't keep a little bit of the cold from the cold days and bring it out on a hot day, or vice versa. We have to learn how to adjust and not be taken up by the ups and downs of the temperatures. Don't make your mind go up and down with them. If it's hot, drink plenty of water and find a cool shady place, a place you can rest.

But the heat still allows you to work on your mind. You can still focus on your

breath even when it's hot. You can still notice when greed, aversion, and delusion are coming up and setting you on fire and creating heat inside. Use the water of concentration, use the coolness of concentration, to help put out those fires. It's even better if you get the water of discernment. You can understand what the fires are coming from so you can put them out and they don't get started again.

But at the very least have a place where you can step back from all that heat and get a perspective on things, get a cool place for the mind to stay.

People I know in Thailand like to compare the mind in concentration to a person in an air-conditioned room. You know it's hot outside, but you've got a cool place inside. The problem is when you start lighting fires inside—that's when it gets really hard to bear. So look at what you're doing to light the fires and stop it. Then find some coolness from the concentration—and the heat outside won't be so bad.