

Finding the Openings

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There are passages in the Canon, verses where monks say, “My hut is well-thatched. The windows and doors are tightly closed. So rain-god, if you want to, just go ahead and rain.”

Of course, the hut there is a symbol for the state of the mind: Impervious to outside influences, it simply is what it is and it has its own protection.

So tonight we might say, “Wind-god, if you want to blow, just go ahead and blow.” I listened to the weather report just now, and they’re forecasting gusts up to 60 miles per hour. So, when you go back to your hut, make sure your hut is all well-fastened.

And then look at your mind. See if you can keep your mind well-fastened from outside influences, from the winds regardless of whatever direction they come from.

There’s another passage that compares the mind of an awakened person to a stone column: sixteen spans tall, eight spans buried in the ground, the other eight sticking up out of the ground, so that no matter which direction the wind comes from, no matter how hard it blows, that column doesn’t quiver or shiver or shake. The eight directions here stand for the eight ways of the world: status and loss of status, gain and loss of gain, praise and criticism, pleasure and pain.

Look at your mind to see how resistant it is to the influence of those things. Or whether it gets blown around, too.

Most of us our minds are like kites. The slightest gust of wind and there goes the kite flying off into the wind. Hardly anything is buried or rooted at all. Sometimes it doesn’t take a strong wind: just the breath out of somebody’s mouth, which goes, what, five miles per hour? Who knows how fast. It blows your mind all over the place. A word of praise and your mind gets all blown up. A word of criticism and your mind gets blown around.

So, you have to learn how to get your mind to offer less resistance to the wind, to allow the wind to go around it.

And find a way to root the mind, first here in the body, and then more deeply in itself, so that you have something solid to hold onto instead of grabbing onto whatever trash comes flying past.

This is why we meditate, to give the mind that kind of grounding. And this is why we develop discernment, so that we offer less resistance to the wind. Because all the things you hold onto as you or yours, either physical things or the concepts

you have about yourself: They offer resistance to the wind, they set up huge sails, so that you can get very easily blown around by change.

But when the mind is concentrated, you can start looking at those things you hold onto to see exactly what there is really *worth* holding onto. After all, it takes effort to hold on. It's second-nature, it comes easily to us, but it takes a lot of effort to hold on. Especially when things change.

You find yourself holding onto something that changes and you try to force it not to change. You keep at it until you finally give up and then you grab onto something else in its place and start the process all over again. There's a lot of effort, a lot of energy expended. But what do you get for it?

The pleasures you've gotten from attachment in the past: Where are they now? Usually what remains is the karma that comes from that attachment, the things you did in order to hold on, some of which were not very skillful at all.

Reflect on the past, then look at the present: What are you doing right now that's going to be of real worth for the future? What ways are you holding on that are going to cause you trouble in the future? Is it really worth it to hold on?

Especially when the wind is blowing from all eight directions and you have to struggle to keep that little edifice you have standing in the midst of the wind.

In terms of that simile at the beginning of the talk—the well-roofed hut—ours is a huge, flimsy construction designed to just blow over as easily as possible. We keep fabricating things, we keep trying to repair the hut and fix it up. And all we do is make it bigger, offering more resistance to the wind, so of course when the wind comes it blows over.

Try to make your hut no bigger than necessary and make sure what hut you do have is well-thatched. Make sure your concentration is solid. Make sure your insight is sharp. Keep the mind well-protected. Because the world doesn't have just wind you know. It has rain, it has all kinds of things to make you suffer if you open yourself up to them.

And yes, we're often told that part of the practice is to be open to things, but I still haven't found that teaching in the Pali Canon. The only openness the Buddha advises is when you're open about your past or present failings, when you admit them openly rather than trying to hide them and keep them festering. That's the only kind of openness I hear the Buddha talking about.

Because the Buddha taught heedfulness. If you open yourself unnecessarily, it's just plain stupid from the point of view of someone who's heedful and vigilant. Because there are dangers out there. The gusts do do blow sixty miles-per-hour sometimes. Or more.

So there is that side of the teaching that tells us to be closed. You have to be

protective, offer shelter for yourself.

The texts also talk about concentration as a home for the mind. It's not the ultimate home, it's not that ultimate hut that's totally well-thatched, that can withstand any storm, but at least it can withstand a lot of things that the normal mind can't withstand.

So focus on getting your mind settled and solid and rooted and strong. The work that goes into settling it is well worth the effort. If we don't do that, what's left for us? We have to embrace change that go flying past, which basically means that we've got to give up.

The Buddha said to use the process of change to improve the mind, to develop good qualities in the mind, so that they can take you to openings onto the goal of the path. When you've arrived at the goal, that's when you're totally free from change.

Those openings don't come along all the time. You've got a good opportunity right now, very few responsibilities, a lot of time to practice. Focus on finding those openings in the mind. Take advantage of this opportunity while you've got it.