

## *The Evening News*

*February 3, 2009*

Time to tune in to the evening news. In other words, what is your mind doing this evening? What is it doing right now?

We have to keep reminding ourselves that that's where all the action is taking place—right here, right now—because the media tend to tell us that the important stuff is happening someplace else. Someone else is doing something important, whereas our time isn't important so we should pay attention to what they have to say.

This is the opposite of what the Buddha has to tell us, which is that the processes shaping your life are happening right here right now. And they're not just happening—you're involved in them. You're willing them.

The problem is that a lot of the things that you're willing are being willed without awareness. They're willed in ignorance, willed under the radar, so you can't be sure whether the direction they're pulling you is really the direction you want to go.

This is why we have to stop and look very carefully at what's happening right now: How are we shaping things right now?

The Buddha recommends that when we want to understand what's going on, we have to look at things in terms of fabrication. What are our intentions? And what are we creating right now? For the most part, we're not looking for fabrication as a process, we're looking at fabricated things: seeing them as things, as worlds, as important issues. And we get sucked into those worlds.

It's like watching a play. We want to get sucked into the make-believe on the stage. We don't like to be distracted by other members of the audience or by the noises backstage. Yet if we want to be free from delusion, we've got to pay attention to the backstage activity. How are things fabricated?

When you're primed to look at things as fabrication processes, then you can calm the fabrications down.

This is a pattern you see throughout the Buddha's teachings on breath meditation. In each of the four tetrads—the ones related to the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, mind in and of itself, mental qualities in and of themselves—the steps are to get sensitive to a particular level of fabrication, to see it as fabrication, and then to calm it down.

For instance, in the first tetrad, you want to get sensitive to the breath. Notice when it's long; notice when it's short. That, apparently, is a shorthand for all the

other things the breath can be: fast or slow, heavy or light, broad or narrow, comfortable or uncomfortable.

Then the Buddha has you be aware of the whole body breathing in, the whole body breathing out. This allows you to see how the breath is having an effect on the body, how it fabricates your sense of the body.

In the fourth step, you allow that fabrication to calm down.

The same with feelings: You get sensitive to when there's rapture and pleasure coming from getting the mind concentrated. Then you see how those things together with the perceptions that go with them—the perception of the breath, the perception of the feelings, the perception of the body—have an impact on the mind. They fabricate the mind. Then you allow that impact to calm down.

With the mind, you want to get sensitive to what state of mind you've got here and then you try to bring it into balance. If it's sluggish or depressed, you try to cheer it up, energize it. If it's scattered, you try to center it and steady it. It's when you've brought it into balance that you try to release it. In other words, you calm down the verbal fabrications, you calm down the mental fabrications as you take it into deeper and deeper levels of concentration.

With mental qualities, you try to be alert to the inconstancy of mental qualities to see how they come and go. If there are unskillful ones, you try to figure out how to fend them off. If there are skillful ones, you try to understand how to give rise to them and then to keep them going and developing.

Finally, you develop dispassion for them so that there can be cessation and relinquishment. That's the ultimate in calm.

In all of these cases, it's important that you learn how to see the present moment as a kind of fabrication. This is where all the action is.

So instead of letting yourself think about what's going on someplace else or create thought worlds and get lost in the thought worlds—as if there were really nothing important to look at right here and right now—you have to realize *the* important thing in life is what's going on right here right now. There's always some fabrication and there's always something to learn from it so that you can understand which kind of fabrication is skillful, which kind is not. And as you see the stress that's involved in the fabrication, you can develop the will to calm.

This is why the Buddha talked about the four determinations. They all go together. The determination for discernment is to see things as fabrications, to see the process of fabrication right here right now and not let yourself get waylaid by the worlds that are getting fabricated, that tend to pull you off, pull you away.

This is why you have to also have the determination to truth: to see truly what's going on right here right now, to see where you are causing stress, always

aware that the mind does have this tendency to lie to itself. We like to think that all of our intentions are skillful, all of our intentions are honest and upright, but you have to learn how to be a little bit skeptical about them. If you don't question your intentions, you never see anything. If you trust them, they can fool you.

So, as the Buddha says, you have to make the resolve to preserve truth, and not let it get covered up by the subterfuges of unconscious or subconscious fabrications, so that when you see that something is stressful, something is causing suffering, then you can will to relinquish it.

That's the third determination: to develop relinquishment. This means wherever you see that there's stress or wherever you see the cause of stress, you try to figure out how to let it go. Sometimes it's obvious. Sometimes it's obvious but it's tied in with something you like to do, so you bring in the discernment to see the connection and why you really do want to let it go.

Finally, there's the determination for calm: that wherever you see the fabrication is causing stress, you want it to calm down. This is what enables the mind to get into deeper, deeper levels of concentration so that it gets more and more sensitive to even subtler levels of what's going on in terms of stress and fabrication.

So you allow those processes to calm down as well. This is a constant pattern: seeing the fabrication and trying to get it to calm—which involves truthfulness in the seeing and relinquishment in the calming.

So that's the evening news. And if you don't like the news, make some of your own. In other words, you see there's stress, you try to do what you can to understand it so you can bring it to calm.

We read about the attainments of other people. That's their news. Let's make our news the kind where we find some real truth inside ourselves. This is where evening news gets special.

The news you see in the media is the same old stuff over and over again—greed, anger, and delusion—or as in that cartoon that appeared in a magazine one time: a magazine stand, and the names of the magazines were the seven deadly sins. And that's true not just in the cartoon: There are the greed magazines, there are passion magazines, the aversion magazines, the delusion magazines all around us.

Imagine what the world would be like if people just stopped breaking the five precepts. There wouldn't be much news.

So that's the kind of stuff you see when you look outside. It doesn't change much. But if you look inside, there is the possibility for genuine change.

As the Buddha said, if you stick with the path, you get to the point where you

realize what you've never realized before, you see what you've never seen before, you know what you've never known before. This is the kind of news that makes a real difference.

So remind yourself: This is where all the important stuff is happening. Worlds are being created right here. But only if you keep looking right here will you see how it's done and how you get can get beyond those worlds.

So stay tuned.