

Truth in Action

October 25, 2012

Truth is one of the qualities we try to develop. But it's not just the truth of what we say, it's the truth of what we *do*. In other words, we see that something is good, it's going to be skillful, and we do everything we can to do it. We're true to our knowledge; we're true to our discernment. It's when you make up your mind to do something good and skillful, and you stick with it, maintain that determination. Being true to that determination: That's the quality of truth.

So truth here is not just a quality of statements, it's a quality of a person, a quality of the heart. Like right now: Make up your mind you're going to stay right here with the breath and then you have to keep watch over yourself. Which means that alertness, the quality that we bring to the present moment, has to cover two things: One, you're alert to the breath; and two, you're alert to the mind. Mindfulness is what reminds you to stay here. And then there's the quality of ardency: You want to do this well, you want to keep on top of what you're doing.

We're here shaping our present moment by focusing on the breath. Simply the fact that we're deciding to stay with the breath is shaping things right there. To shape them skillfully, though, you really have to notice what you're doing. That's what the alertness does: It keeps you honest, it keeps you from going into denial. You stay with *this* breath and then *this* breath and then *this* breath, keeping watch on what you're doing. And part of the mind says, "Well, when will I be able to let go of this and not have to worry about what I'm doing?" But it turns out the whole practice is about watching what you're doing. It simply gets more and more refined.

To get the mind to settle down is an activity, it's something you develop, it's part of the path. The path is the means by which we reach the goal. It doesn't cause the goal but it gets us there., in the same way that the road to Los Angeles doesn't cause Los Angeles but it gets you to Los Angeles if you follow it.

So you stick with these activities and monitor what you're doing. Because the alertness here eventually turns into vision, the mindfulness turns into knowledge. When they talk about knowledge and vision of awakening, these are the qualities that get you there. And you keep on looking at things in terms of actions.

Even when the mind gets deep into concentration, you have to look at it as an action. Once it's stabilized there, as the Buddha says, you settle in and even indulge in the pleasure of the concentration. Don't be afraid of the pleasure of the concentration. It's part of your nourishment on the path, but as with eating food,

you can't keep eating all the time. You get your nourishment and then you do your work. And the work here is to step back a bit and look at the state of your concentration, and see what you're doing to keep it there, and see what you're doing that's still disturbing it.

Maybe the perception that's holding you to the breath is a little bit too coarse. Or in the early stages of the concentration, maybe you're focused on the wrong spot. There are lots of things you might be doing that are causing trouble. Even though you may be settling in, you ask yourself, "Could it be more refined? Could it be more solid? Could there be less disturbance to the concentration?" You look not at disturbances outside. You look inside. And if you catch the mind doing something that's adding any unnecessary stress, then you drop the activity.

This is an important part of the practice, seeing things as actions. This is why the Buddha starts out by talking about action from the very beginning. Where's the action? The action is in the intention. Where's the intention? It's here in the mind.

So you look at even your concentration not as a state of Oneness or as the ground of being or Buddha-nature or whatever but as a state of mind you've created. Even the highest form of non-duality, the Buddha said—the non-duality of consciousness—is still fabricated. It's still something that's put together. And you want to see that as an activity. That's how you get to go beyond it.

So it's not the case that we work at being very careful about what we're doing up to a certain point and then we can forget about it. You have to see everything as an action. You have to see yourself as being responsible for what you're doing. Your level of stress right now comes partly from past actions but the important element is what you're doing right now. Particularly any stress you feel in the mind: It's a result of what you're doing right now.

So learn how to look at your actions. And learn how to notice your mistakes, admit your mistakes, and not get all flustered by them. The judgment here isn't the kind of final judgment that some judge is going to place on you, to determine guilt or innocence. It's the judgment of a craftsman judging a work in progress: something that an artist or a carpenter or a musician would do. You look at what you're doing, you're looking at the results, and then you take what you've noticed and you improve what you continue to do, without tying yourself all up in knots.

So remember that it's all about action. The Buddha's asking you to be responsible. This is why the element of truth is so important. If you go around thinking that you're basically good or basically bad, you're throwing the responsibility off on other things over which you have no control. In other words, if you're basically bad, then you're going to need somebody else to do all the work

for you. If you're basically good, you just tap into your natural goodness, telling yourself you don't have to think about anything; the goodness will take over and do your work for you. But the Buddha's saying that you can't think in either of those terms. They get in the way of seeing what you're actually doing. You've got skillful actions; you've got unskillful actions. You've got to learn how to distinguish the difference between the two. And if you see something is unskillful, you've got to learn how to abandon it. If something is skillful, do what you can to encourage it, develop it.

So you're taking responsibility for yourself. This is when the meditation really becomes yours. It's not an exercise imposed on you from outside, or some weird relic from some foreign culture that we're playing with. It's an opportunity for you to look at how your mind works and how you're fashioning, fabricating the present moment all the time—to make you more sensitive to that process so that you can do it more skillfully, more and more skillfully, all the way up to the level of learning how not to fashion anything at all.

So this is why truthfulness is so important. We look for people we can trust, but the best way to look for someone you can trust is to learn how to make yourself trustworthy: that when you make up your mind you're going to do something, you do it. When you make up your mind you're not going to do something, you don't do it. You're true to what you see is really wise. When you become trustworthy that way, then when you're with other people you get a better and better sense of whom you can trust and whom you can't.

So this quality of truthfulness: If you want to find the truth in life, you have to be true. So take responsibility for being true. And that's how the path will develop.