

A Home of Your Own

January 1, 2017

When we focus on the in-and-out breath, we're focusing not so much on the air coming in and out through the nose as on the feeling of breathing as we feel it from inside. When you breathe in, which parts of the body move? Do they feel coordinated or do they feel like they're working at cross purposes? Do they feel tight or more open? Try to breathe in a way that feels open, where the whole body feels coordinated. Try to get as sensitive as possible to this area of your awareness, an area that we tend to squeeze out because we're paying attention to things outside. It's time to move back in, to reclaim this area as your home. Because, basically, it is yours more than anything else out there in the world.

You probably remember that time when you were a child and you began to wonder: When you see blue, do other people see the same blue that you do? You can point to something and say it's blue, but when they see blue does it look the same color in their eyes as it does in yours? That's something you can't know. Your blue is your blue, and it may be the same as someone else's, and it may not. Now, with colors, it's not all that important. But we're dealing with something that's important inside, in the same area of your awareness, and that's pain, stress, suffering.

The Pali word *dukkha* covers all those things. That's what we are working on understanding. Because that sense of pain is what makes it hard to live in this home of ours right here, and it drives us to do all kinds of things that we later regret. Our fear of pain makes us greedy, angry, deluded about things, fearful about things, jealous of things. It pushes us around all the time. When you don't feel comfortable in this home, you look for solutions outside. The Buddha's approach is to turn around and say, no, you've got to look inside for the solution. The problem's inside; the solution's inside.

And part of the solution is just this: learning to get back into this inner home of yours, and to make it a home of your own—in other words, the kind of place where you would like to stay. We live in the world outside, but we live even more in this world inside, because the world outside keeps pushing us away. Even our bodies keep pushing us, till they push us out entirely. In the meantime, though, this home inside is what you really can lay claim to as yours, and it really is safe, and doesn't involve any conflicts. Nobody else can try to move in, nobody can push you out. What does happen, though, is that you let other people push you

out. In other words, you go running after things that they want, and they push you around. So now's the time to turn around and re-inhabit this place.

So try to feel the body all the way down to the toes, all the way down to the fingers, throughout the whole body. This is your area. Inhabit it. If there is any one part of the body where the breath doesn't feel comfortable, you can change it. Think of the breath as just the energy that courses through the body as you breathe in, breathe out. In some areas it's going to be more obvious than others. But as the mind settles down, the more obvious areas calm down, and then the other areas become more apparent.

And you want to think of everything in the body flowing smoothly together. You can hold an image in the mind of the breath flowing down the spine, down the legs, the energy flowing through the blood vessels, around through the body; whatever helps you inhabit this place, with a sense that you can exert some control over the sense of ease or dis-ease you feel in the body. Make this your sense of who you are. As the Buddha said, our sense of who we are changes from one desire to another. So try to hold onto the desire to be here, to be still, to be settled down, to find a place where the mind can rest.

In this home inside, there are no TVs, there's no Internet. In other words, we don't want this inner space to be invaded by anything outside. The problem, though, is that we bring things in. It's like your physical home. TVs don't push their way into your home. You have to buy them. Computers don't push their way in. You have to buy them. Once you've bought them, you find that you've got your house invaded. News of the world comes in, all kinds of crazy stuff comes in, and you get so that you can't live without it. But you actually can live a lot better without it. After all, this is your home. Homes outside always involve conflict.

As the Buddha said when he had that vision of life being like a bunch of fish in a little tiny stream, fighting one another over that last gulp of water before they had their last gasp: He looked around and he didn't see anything that wasn't laid claim to. No matter where you go, everybody has their claims on things. And to have a house outside, you have to assert your claims as well.

So, there's going to be conflict, and you have to decide: Exactly how much conflict is it worth? You would think that we could all live together in a reasonable way, but, as the Buddha once said, even if it rained gold coins, it wouldn't satisfy our sensual desires. And some people want to have all the gold coins for themselves. This is why people are pushing one another around all over the world.

So, to whatever extent you need a home outside, you have to decide, "How much conflict do I have to put up with? How much is worth it?" Remembering

always that this home inside is where you're eventually going to go anyhow. Even when you die, there will still be the sense of this inner awareness that you feel from within. It'll just relocate.

So you want to be able to feel at home here, and notice any impulses in the mind that want to go out. For the time being, none of those impulses are worth it. When you're living outside, some thoughts may be necessary for you to think. But right now, thoughts that leave the sense of the body are off-limits. Once you've made up that decision, of course, you begin to see how often the mind does go streaming out after other things. You have to see: Where does that current come from? How do those thoughts start? You'll be sitting here with the breath, and all the sudden you find yourself someplace else. How did that happen? What were the warning signals? You'll find that the mind does have its warning signals; little messages that get sent around.

It's as if you've got a bureaucracy inside, and not everybody wants all their emails to be known by the boss. So they'll send a few messages here and there when you're not paying attention, and then you suddenly discover that you have a revolt on your hands. They're going to take over. And, all too often, they're so good at it that you think that it's you, and you go running along with them. But you have to realize that the mind has its random members of the bureaucracy, so you don't have to follow everything they say. After all, you are the chairman, you are in charge here. When you can detect the underground movements, they lose a lot of their power. You see them coming and you breathe right through them. You change your attitudes toward these thoughts. They're not all that important.

This is why concentration, on its own, is not enough. You have to have some discernment as well: the discernment to see what is really important to think about and what's not. When something is not worth thinking about, you know how to take it apart so that it doesn't take over.

This means that getting the mind still is not just a matter of resting, it's also a matter of gaining some understanding of what's going on inside, what keeps churning out these thoughts that make you want to keep it going out, out, out, all the time. And then, understanding those things, you gain some power. You can turn them off when you don't need them, you can turn them back on when you do. You're more in control.

This, then, does become a home of your own. That's what we're working on when we meditate. The Pali term, *vihāra-dhamma*, literally means a quality which is your dwelling, a quality which is your home: this quality of concentration. We're inhabiting the body from within, getting to know our own mind from

within, and we keep making this the primary focus of our awareness so that it stands out.

As for the world outside, you can keep it at bay for the time being. You want to inhabit this place. Because once you have this place, and this really is your home, then you realize that when we live in the world, we're sojourners. We're here for a little while and then we move on.

So, what can we take with us? Well, we can take the goodness we've done. But we also take the bad things we've done. What we can't take is our external homes, all the places outside we've laid claim to. Not just places of course, but also people we lay claim to, positions, people's opinion of us that we lay claim to: All of that is going to be left behind. But the good or bad things that we did in order to get that, that's what we're going to take with us. Because those things become the quality of the mind. They're embedded within it.

So what kind of actions do you want to take with you to make a long-lasting fixture in your home? You want them to be acts of generosity, acts of virtue, acts of discernment. Those are the best things for decorating your house inside. With them, it becomes easier to become more and more at ease being here, having a strong sense this is where you really belong, so that the things that the world uses to tempt you to come out lose a lot of their power. You keep your own priorities straight and you keep them in charge. Because that's what meditation does: It helps you to reclaim your life by reclaiming this area of your awareness, and reminding you that this is the most important place to be, the place where you really can have a home of your own.