

What Are You Taking into the Future?

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Try to inhabit your body fully. Think of being fully present, from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet, all throughout the body. As for any thoughts that come into the mind that are not related to the body, not related to the breath, realize that they're not as real as your experience of the body and the breath right now.

This is one of our main problems in life: We're driven by our thoughts, by the little becomings we create in our mind, the little worlds we create in our mind, and they obscure our awareness of what's actually going on.

There's an interesting passage where the Buddha says, "Something you've never seen before: Do you have any craving there?" And you might think, well, of course, you can crave all kinds of things you've never seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or sensed. But that's not what he's getting at. He's saying that if it's something you haven't seen before, the thing itself is not where the craving is. The craving is in the thought *about* that thing. And the clinging is there, and then the suffering is right there. So with your thoughts about what you'd like to see or hear or smell or taste or touch in the future, your craving is not *there* at those things in the future. The craving is right *here* at the thoughts going through the mind. And so you want to look at them: To what extent can you trust those thoughts? Here they are, the things that are driving you—as the Buddha says, we're a slave to craving, we're a slave to the craving for our thoughts—and yet they can be so wrong, even though we give them so much reality.

This is why it's important to have the perspective that comes when you're fully in the present moment. Your relationship to the past and your relationship to the future get changed. The past is just a memory right now. It's gone. The future's not here yet. So when thoughts of past and future come in, remember they're just thoughts. The reality of the karma that you're creating right now: That's what's actually there in the present, and that's what you want to understand. You want to see when craving comes up for a thought: Where is it coming from? How does it start? How does it end? And what's the allure?

Remember what the Buddha said about sensuality: It's not your sensual pleasures that you're so attracted to, it's your plans for those sensual pleasures. That's where the craving is. And this principle applies across the board. Your fears about the future: It's not the future that you're afraid of. Thoughts come into the mind, and you're afraid of those thoughts, you latch onto them out of fear. So you have to look at them: Are they things that you really want to get involved with? Are they things you can trust? Try to give them less reality, and give more reality to the *processes* by which these things happen.

The skill that comes from learning how to deal with these things so you don't fall for them, you don't suffer from them, is something you can develop in the present moment *and* carry

over into the future. And it's a good thing to carry over, because everything we do in the present moment has an arrow. It points toward the future. It will lead to something. That's what the teaching about karma is all about: Actions have their impact now, they give their results now, but those aren't the only results. The results also go on into the future.

This comes from the process of fabrication. In the Buddha's analysis of suffering, fabrication comes before your awareness of the six senses. So even before sensory contact comes, there's a fabricated thought or a process of fabrication that wants things to go in a certain direction, that has a purpose. The Buddha talks about how the mind fabricates form for the sake of formness, feeling for the sake of feelingness, and so on down the line. It's a strange expression, it's hard to say why the Buddha says it's for the sake of "formness" or "feelingness" or "perceptionhood." The Commentary tries to explain this way of phrasing the issue away, saying simply that we fabricate form *as* form, feelings *as* feelings, perceptions *as* perceptions, and so on. But that misses something which is very clear in the Pali: that the Buddha's talking about how the mind has a purpose in fabricating things. Everything is purposeful. All the mind's fabrications are "for the sake of." They're going in a certain direction.

And you have to ask yourself: Of the various things in the present moment that could lead in different directions, what's the most useful thing to ride with? As the Buddha said, your understanding of the processes in the mind is something you can take into the future and it'll serve you well—unlike your thoughts about the future, what's going to happen, what you would like to see or what you're afraid of seeing. Those thoughts are uncertain. And when you see the extent to which they have a huge impact on the choices you make, you should be wary of them.

Whereas your knowledge of the skills, your knowledge of the processes going on in the mind and how to master those: That's something that will always stand you in good stead. When you can see a thought form, when you can see how you give meaning to it, when you can see why it has an allure and you can see *through* the allure, that knowledge will protect you at all times.

So try to give more reality to the present moment than you do to your thoughts of the past and the future. Because it's by taking on this point of view here in the present moment that you're going to understand what's going on. We talk about getting the mind into right concentration, into right mindfulness as a refuge: It's not a place where we're hiding away. On the contrary, it's a place where we're actually seeing what's going on in the mind, and see how the mind can take anything and create suffering out of it. But if it has skill, it can take anything and create something good out of it.

It's like being a cook. If you're a lousy cook, no matter what good ingredients you get, the food is going to come out lousy. If you're a good cook, sometimes you can take things that are half-rotten and still make good food out of them. So these are the skills you want.

And the direction you're giving to your life by mastering these skills takes you where you want to go. We all want to go to a happiness that we can rely on, a happiness we can trust, and the Buddha's showing us how it's done. And just as we have our purpose, his Dhamma has a purpose, too: for the sake of that true happiness.

There are a lot of places in the Canon where the word *Dhamma* is paired with *attha* (which is distinct from *atta*, which means self). "Attha" means purpose, meaning, goal. The Dhamma's not just there to sit and be argued about. It's got a purpose. It's there to put into action, for the sake of true happiness. And if you adopt true happiness as *your* purpose, then the Dhamma can show you how it's possible to find a place of real safety. That's the refuge.

So we're not hiding out. We're actually getting back in touch with reality, the reality of the present moment. And from *this* reality we're learning about the way we create states of becoming, the way we lie to ourselves and then drive our lives by our lies, our fears, our desires, our lust, and end up suffering for it. And then we can see we don't have to do it that way. There's another way of managing your mind, by mastering the skills of seeing these processes.

We learn this by creating a state of concentration and by maintaining it. Then we can apply that knowledge to the other ways in which we create becomings in the mind, create purposes in the mind, so that we can see through the areas where we've been deluding ourselves. We thought we had to think in a certain way, or wanted to think in a certain way, but now we realize we were deluded.

So we have our choice: Which purposes in the present moment do we want to cultivate? And remember: When we cultivate a purpose, we're taking something with us into the future, so what you want to take? Do you want to take ideas that are based on ignorance? Purposes based on ideas that are based on ignorance that could be true or could very easily be false? Or do you want to take the knowledge that comes from seeing through the way the mind can lie to itself, the way it can make things up and then convince itself that the things it's making up right here in the present moment have a reality that's bigger than the present moment? If we choose to take that knowledge, it opens even more choices to us. It's because we have choices that we have to be heedful, because the choices make a difference.

People can direct their entire lives on ideas that are formulated in ignorance and lead to nothing but suffering and more and more and more suffering. Or they can learn how to take apart the present moment and see where the mind lies to itself, where it's being true to itself, and carry *that* knowledge into the future. At the very least, it can alleviate a lot of potential suffering. And as the Buddha said, it can ultimately put an end to suffering altogether. That's the choice we have, and we're making it right now.