

Greed & Distress with Reference to the World

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The Buddha's formula for right mindfulness contains his instructions on how to get the mind into right concentration, and it contains two verbs. In other words, there are two activities that we do. One is dwelling. The word *viharati*, to dwell, can also mean to keep doing something. Here we dwell with the breath, the body in and of itself, just as you feel it right now. You're not thinking about the body in terms of the world, whether it's able to do the work of the world or looks good in the eyes of the world. Your interest simply is learning how to settle down with a sense of the body, a sense of the breath right here.

You want to make this your home, so learn how to feel that you're surrounded by the breath. It's not just in one spot of the body. It's all around. Allow yourself to feel bathed in the breath, bathed in the energy of just having a body. As you breathe in and out, allow that energy to flow smoothly. You're mindful to stay with this frame of reference. In other words, you keep this in mind. You're alert to what you're doing. And you're ardent: You want to do it well.

But that's not the only activity. The other one is putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. This means that you fend off any other thoughts that are going to come into the mind and pull you away from your frame of reference. Sometimes this second part of the formula gets forgotten, as when they say, "Just be with whatever comes up. Be okay with whatever comes up." But no. You have to put aside, or subdue—that's another translation of the verb, *vineyya*—subdue your thoughts of greed and distress with reference to the world.

So any distraction that comes up, you've got to put it aside. A lot of very attractive things are going to come along because, as the mind settles down, doesn't have any other immediate chores, immediate tasks, and this clears the space for things inside the mind to come bubbling up. It's almost as if they see their chance, "Here's some empty space, empty time." And some old issues you might want to think about, or some new issues, see this as their chance. So you have to be very firm with yourself in putting these things aside.

In terms of distress with reference to the world, the number one issue that's hardest to put down is the sense that you've been wronged. There's a very strong sense of self that grows around that and a very strong sense that if you don't keep that in mind, you're going to miss out on some justice, so you're the one who has to keep the issue alive. You have to realize that whether the wrong was deserved or not, it's an issue that you have to chalk up to karma. You may have done

something like that a long time ago. It's so long ago that you've forgotten and it doesn't seem right that something you've forgotten so long ago should come back and hit you, but that's how karma works. Sometimes things take many lifetimes before they show up. So it's not a case of whether you deserved it or didn't deserve it. It's simply that there was a cause and this was the result. And there's no need to feel that you have to keep it in mind in order to have justice done, because again, karma will work out. You don't have to keep score. You don't have to be the avenging angel.

So if thoughts come up of times when you've been wronged, just say, "Well, that's karma. That's the world. But it's not my territory right now." Remember the Buddha's image of the quail or his image of the monkeys. When the quail goes wandering off out of its safe territory, it gets caught by the hawk. When the monkeys go wandering off out of their safe territory, they get trapped by hunters. As you go wandering off into things like that, you're going to get trapped. Greed, aversion, and delusion are going to come get you. So remind yourself that your safe place is with the breath, and even though nothing much may be happening with the breath, at least you're safe. Why go venturing out into dangerous territory? "Well, it's more interesting," you may say. Or again, there's a sense of obligation. You think that certain thoughts have to be maintained in order to get justice done. Well, that's wrong mindfulness.

There is wrong concentration and there's wrong mindfulness, too. Wrong concentration is when you get focused on sensual desire or ill will or sloth or anxiety or your doubts, and you just keep at those thoughts. You get obsessed with them. That is a kind of concentration, but it's wrong. Any mindfulness that would keep those issues in mind is wrong mindfulness.

Right mindfulness is safe. And although it may not seem interesting in the beginning, you can make yourself interested in it. Remind yourself: This is the breath energy of your body. This is the energy that keeps your life going. If it's blocked in any part of the body, it's going to cause discomfort. It'll cause illness. So simply for the health of the body, the health of the mind, it's good to work with the breath and develop a sense of feeling at ease, being right here. That can help get you over your sense of distress about the world.

As for greed about the world, some of the attractive thoughts of greed are thoughts of, "Well, maybe I'll get some psychic powers when I meditate. After all, we read about all the hungry ghosts and the devas and whatnot. Wouldn't it be fun to encounter some?" Some people start having visions as they meditate. And the question is, are they true or are they not? And I've always liked Ajaan Mun's way of dealing with this, what he taught to Ajaan Fuang. He said it doesn't matter

whether the being who comes to see you is true or not. The question is, what's the message? Is it in line with the Dhamma? If the being doesn't have any message, well, just wish that being goodwill. That can be your message to yourself that there are beings out there who are suffering. Here you are meditating, getting all this merit. There may be somebody out there who sees it and would like a little piece. So you're happy to share it. That reminds you that as you meditate: It's not just for yourself. You're not just straightening out your own mind. You're generating some goodness for the world.

When you think about all the minds out there that are churning out greed, aversion, and delusion right now: They talk about how the frequency of the electric current that goes through the United States can be detected even out in outer space. I'm pretty sure that the frequency of the minds churning out greed, aversion, and delusion right now can probably be detected out there as well. So it would be good to have a mind that's churning out something good: a sense of inner well-being that's not taking anything away from anyone else. You have to realize that when thoughts go out in the world as to what you'd like in terms of gaining something from somebody else or gaining justice for wrongs that have been done, you're going into a territory where lots of people have claims. There's always going to be a conflict.

Remember that vision the Buddha had of the whole world being laid claim to, with lots of overlapping claims. So if you're looking for happiness outside, you're going to have to fight other people off, whereas if you're looking for happiness within, nobody going to be able to take your sensation of your breath away from you. That's yours. Nobody else can come and say, "I want that sensation of the breath," or "I want that sensation of the body as you feel it from within," or "I want your sensation of your mind." They can't take it. It's yours.

So you're free to work with these areas of your awareness that are totally yours. They can be cultivated. They can be nourished. You can breathe in a way that gives rise to ease. You can think of the breath energy spreading through the body to take that ease everywhere in the body so that you feel bathed all around, out to the skin. That's something you can do with this territory of yours. You can spread your awareness so that it's not just confined to one little topic. It fills the whole body with a sense of expansiveness. You can think thoughts of goodwill: "May other beings share in the same kind of happiness." They may not have your particular sensations, but this possibility of getting the mind to settle down like this is something anybody can develop if they're interested and if they put enough effort in. And you realize it'd be a good thing. You gain the well-being of

concentration. There's no thought that, "I want this alone and I don't want anyone else to have any sensation like this."

It becomes more and more automatic to relate well to the breath. You realize that all you have to do is be with the breath and get a sensitivity to what kind of breathing feels good and how heavily to focus on the breath so that you don't put too much pressure on it, but you don't put too little pressure on it. When you get that sense of the right touch, you see how good this is. The natural response is that you'd like other people to be able to do this as well. The world would be a much better place if we could all do this.

So remember, we're here to dwell with the breath to make it our home, and at the same time to fend off thoughts of greed and distress with reference to the world. Those are the two activities we're doing. Make sure that you bring them into balance. That's how mindfulness becomes right mindfulness and your concentration becomes right concentration. As you bring the qualities of mindfulness, ardency, and alertness to what you're doing, you can create a sense of well-being in which you can look at the world and say, "I don't need to lay claim to things out there. I've got something really good here inside."