

## *Inner Worlds*

*March 28, 2020*

Each of us lives in many different worlds. There's the world of work, the world of our family, and our inner worlds. These worlds inside are the ones we're most responsible for, because no one else can take care of them. So we have to learn how to make them nourishing. If they're starved, if all we can talk to ourselves about is how miserable we are, how impoverished we are, how much we're in danger, it spills out to our other worlds as well. So even though as we're meditating we're focusing inside, it's not a selfish activity. When you learn how to develop a nourishing inner world here, you're nourishing not only yourself in this world, but also the way you act in the worlds outside.

So for the time being, put everything else aside. Just be right here, right now. Notice how you breathe. Notice how you're talking to yourself. Notice the feelings you're focusing on and the perceptions you're holding in mind. Try to bring these things together in a good way: Breathe in a way that's nourishing. Talk to yourself in a way that's nourishing. If the chatter in the mind weighs you down, pulls you down, blames everything on things outside, you've got to counteract it. Find new ways of talking to yourself.

This is one of the reasons why we have the chants at the beginning of the meditation: goodwill for all beings, goodwill for ourselves, reflections on aging, illness, and death, and the fact that they are normal and that the survival of the body is not the be-all and end-all of our lives.

If physical survival were everything, then the current pandemic would be a cause for real concern and you'd have to focus all your energies on making sure that nothing happened that would put you in any physical danger. But you have to remember that survival of the mind is something else—and something more important. The mind sheds bodies in the way we shed clothes. We wear clothes until they get old and worn out, and we can't wear them anymore, and then we just throw them away. There will come a time when you have to throw the body away. It may come sooner than you want, but it's going to have to happen. But the shape of the mind is something you have to maintain regardless, because that will stick with you. That goes with you wherever you go. And so you want to be able to live life in a way where you're talking to yourself and your breathing in a way that's nourishing, in a way where the mind is in good shape and can live with itself.

I've been to hospitals where people are dying and they have the TV on in the background, and I've always thought: "This is horrible: Here you are, getting ready to die, you've got distractions all around already, and you add more on top of it." But then I realized that for most people, they have no skills.

They haven't been taught how to shape their minds properly, how to shape the present moment properly, how to shape this internal world in a way that's nourishing. And so their internal world is not very livable. So they look elsewhere for escape.

Here, though, we have the skills, we've learned the skills. So take advantage of them. Because otherwise, there's no real escape from the suffering we cause ourselves.

Remember the Buddha's teachings on the four noble truths: The suffering that weighs the mind down is the suffering that comes from inside, not from things outside. If we're constantly focusing on things outside—"This is wrong, that's wrong"—we're missing the point. The point is that we're making ourselves suffer from this thing or that thing. And we don't have to.

The mind does have a potential for freedom. We get a taste of this when the mind settles down, even just in concentration and you can give all your attention to this world inside. If you do it well, then as far as you're concerned, the world outside doesn't even have to exist. It doesn't matter. *You need a space in the mind where things outside don't matter*, because otherwise the mind becomes a slave to things outside. It becomes their servant. It needs its time alone where the clamoring of the world outside just doesn't matter. What matters is the survival of your goodness, your ability to live with yourself. And that takes work.

So take this opportunity to create a good place inside where things outside don't matter, where things even in the body don't matter. Only the survival of your goodness is what matters—the survival of your well-being inside. This is where the practice of concentration contains an element of discernment already in its sense of values to create the space and then to maintain a sense of well-being as you go back into the other worlds.

This requires determination, and it also requires discernment because as you go into the other worlds, it's all too easy to pick up their attitudes, pick up their values, pick up their concerns and make yourself forget the goodness that you've developed inside, the sense of well-being that you can carry around into situations that may not be all that good, may not be all that supportive. You've got to learn how to support this sense of well-being inside yourself.

It requires a certain amount of detachment from the world, but it's a healthy detachment. It's a detachment where your goodness doesn't have to depend on things outside because you've got this inner nourishment. And, acting from that detachment, you can deal with issues outside more skillfully.

So even though as we're focusing inside we're putting the rest of the world outside aside and saying that it really doesn't matter for the time being, we're not being irresponsible. We're nourishing the world in the mind. When this world is nourished and you learn how to maintain the nourishment, then in

your dealings with the worlds outside, you're not so hungry. And you're not taking your frustration out on other people.

We've seen this with hummingbirds. On the days when the feeders are empty, they don't come and attack the human beings who forgot to fill the feeders. They attack one another. "It's your fault," they say, "that I'm hungry." That's because they've forgotten the flowers and other places where they can go for their food.

In the same way, we take things out on one another because we've forgotten where our real nourishment should lie: inside. And it's something we have to be responsible for. No one else can do this work for us.

So look at the way you breathe, look at the way you talk to yourself about the breath, about other issues that might come in and interfere with the breath. Look at the perceptions you're holding in mind—again, about the breath itself and also about the things that would pull your way—and learn how to sort them out.

When you engage in these fabrications with knowledge, you can put an end to suffering. If you do it in ignorance, you're going to create more suffering. It's your choice. And part of knowledge is realizing the importance of your choices: the opportunities, the options that are available for you. You can create a good world inside, you can maintain a good world inside, but you have to give it priority. Otherwise, the values you've picked up from the worlds outside barge in and take priority, trashing what you've done inside. That happens because of a lack of skill. It happens because you let it happen.

Try to strengthen your resolve that you're going to find nourishment inside. If there are any problems in the mind, you're going to look for the causes inside and you're going to cure them inside. Because when they're cured inside, then there's nothing outside that can weigh the mind down, nothing outside that can make it suffer.

So look at the world you're creating right now. Give it your full attention. And remember that if it's not in good shape, there are skills you can develop to put it in good shape. Do your best to master those skills. This would be good for you and for everyone else around you.