

A Well-thatched Roof

December 28, 2020

A night like this with a cold rain outside makes you think of that verse in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says if the mind is not well developed, it's like a hut that hasn't been well thatched. It's going to leak. Rain can leak in. In the same way, when the mind is not developed, passion can leak in.

When the mind *is* well developed, though, it's like a hut that has been properly thatched. Rain can't leak in. Passion can't leak into that kind of mind.

So how do you develop the mind? You do it by trying to get it into right concentration, because you develop a lot of skills in the process of getting your concentration right.

The Buddha also talks about the well-developed mind as one that's resistant to pain. In other words, pain comes and you're not overwhelmed by it. That's paired with being developed in body, which he says means being resistant to pleasure. You have to learn how to be resistant to both. In other words, don't let them overcome the mind. And you do that by getting the mind still in the proper way.

When you're dealing with pain, you have to have your techniques. You have to have your strategies. You don't just sit there with the pain. You're trying to figure it out—what it is about physical pain that pains the mind. And there are stages to doing that.

The first stage, of course, is not to focus straight on the pain. Gather your forces in another part of the body that you *can* make comfortable with the breath. Learn simply to accept the fact that if the pain is in the knee, the pain can have the knee. If it's in your waist, it can have your waist. If it's in the middle of your head, it can have the middle of your head. You can be someplace else.

This is a good lesson in not-self. But also it's a good lesson in looking around and seeing what strengths you *do* have and what you *can* do with the breath to give the mind a place to stay. When it's well gathered, then you can think of the good energy you have where you're focused and spread it through the pain. If the pain is in the knee, think of it going down the leg, through the knee, and out the foot. If it's in the head, think of it coming up to the neck and going out through the eyes, or coming up around from the back of the head, and then going through the front of neck down into the chest.

There are lots of ways you can visualize this. The important thing is that you get so that you're not afraid of the pain. Then you're ready to investigate it to see what perceptions are making you use the pain to stab the mind. You can replace

them with different perceptions—like the one of the pain being just little pulses, not a solid block, and the pulses are going away. They're not coming at you; they're going away from you. They arise only to disappear into the distance. They may be replaced immediately, but those ones will disappear, going away from you, too. Learn to chop up the pain into little bits so that it's not so overwhelming. Those are some ways of using your concentration to develop the mind so it's not overcome by pain.

Then there's the question of not being overcome by pleasure. You can sit here, and your breath gets very still and very quiet. The mind gets quiet. And then you lose focus. What's happened is that you've dropped the breath, maybe because the breath was too subtle or simply because the pleasure that came with the breath was so much more interesting—more enjoyable. So you drop the perception of the breath, and you just go wallow in the pleasure. Then you come out, and you realize that you've totally lost your alertness.

The way to deal with that is, as soon as the breath gets comfortable, to give your mind work to do in the comfort. In other words, work on spreading it around. Make a survey of the body from the head to the toes and from the toes to the head, noticing where the breath energy is flowing well, where it's not flowing well, and what you can do to straighten it out. Then do your best to develop a full-body awareness so that you're aware of the head and the feet and the hands—every part of the body all at the same time.

In other words, when things get comfortable, realize that you've been given some energy. Use that energy to get the mind fully established. There's a phrase in the Pali, which can be translated as *having your entire awareness focused*. It's all here. That way, even though there is pleasure, it doesn't overcome your alertness; it doesn't overcome your mindfulness.

These are some ways in which right concentration can help you so that you can have what's called a developed mind in a developed body.

But the practice of right concentration also helps in other ways. You're developing two qualities, tranquility and insight, at the same time. This is a point that's often misunderstood. People equate right concentration with tranquility, and the insight is someplace else. But the Buddha never taught that way. He says if you want to develop calm and insight, you've got to get the mind into jhana. And if you want to get the mind into jhana, you've got to develop tranquility and insight.

They work together because as you're getting the mind to settle down, you have to understand the workings of the mind. That's what we do when we engage in directed thought and evaluation, particularly the evaluation. What's going on

when the mind is settling down? What's working? What's not working? If it's not working, you try to figure it out so that it does. To understand that, you're going to have to look at the mind in terms of the processes of fabrication: the breath, the directed thought and evaluation in and of itself, and your feelings and perceptions. What is it that's out of balance? What is it that's wrong? What needs to be changed?

It's only when you get to know the mind like this that you can get the mind into right concentration. There are other ways you can get the mind just to settle down and be really still, but the concentration is not going to be right if you don't understand the workings of the mind. So in that way, you're developing insight. And of course, as the mind settles down, it becomes more tranquil. The Buddha says when you develop tranquility and insight to a full measure, you develop both awareness-release and discernment-release.

Awareness release is when you're released from passion. This can be passion for pleasure—passion for all kinds of things. But the Buddha was wise enough to see that we're passionate not only for the pleasures. We're more directly passionate for the passion itself. We like it when the mind has that flow of energy. But that flow of energy that goes out to things: That's one of the ways that the effluents manifest and stir up trouble. When you get the mind really calm, you can see that.

You may have had this experience as you, say, do walking meditation. Your mind goes flowing out, but for once you don't go flowing out with it. You see it go out a little ways and it stops. You say, "Okay, there it is. That's the flow of the mind. When the Thai ajaans talk about the currents or the flow of the mind, this is what they're talking about." You begin to realize how much you've been riding with those flows all along. But then they drown you. They turn into floods.

So as you develop this quality of tranquility—in other words, keeping the mind really, really still—you can detect movements in the mind you wouldn't have seen otherwise. You begin to see the things that you were passionate for in the past are not really worth it. You see the effort that goes into churning up passion for these things, and you drop it. This is how the mind gets into awareness-release.

Discernment-release, the Buddha said, gets rid of your passion for ignorance. Someone asked today, "How is anybody passionate for ignorance?" It's in being passionate for wrong views. After all, what does right view tell us? It tells us we're suffering because of our own actions, and there are a lot of people who don't want to hear that. It's also telling us that suffering is something you don't have to accept, but it's going to take work to get past it. Some people say, "Well, I'll just learn how to put up with it. I'll be okay." All of that is being passionate for

ignorance. Of course, that means you're going to stay stuck in the suffering that comes from it.

You even see it in some modern Dhamma teachers. They don't like the four noble truths. They tell us that they're not noble. They tell us that they're not truths. They tell us that the word for *origination* doesn't mean origination; it means result. In other words, suffering results in craving. But that doesn't give you any idea of how you're going to get rid of the suffering. It's basically saying you have to put up with the craving and the suffering. Learn to embrace them, and you'll be okay.

So there are lots of different ways you can be passionate for ignorance, and a lot of it comes down to laziness, a willingness to put up with things that you don't really have to put up with. The Buddha says, "Look, you don't have to suffer at all. There is a dimension that can be touched by the mind where there's absolutely no suffering, no limitations whatsoever." Yet we put limitations on ourselves because we're afraid of the work that needs to be done.

When you begin to see, though, that the way you put things together is causing suffering, and you don't have to put things together that way—there's another way—this is how insight cuts through. You see it's not necessary, that suffering. You have an alternative. Go for it. When you develop the mind in this way, you're getting the right balance in your concentration. You're balancing both insight and tranquility. As Ajaan Lee points out, the insight is there in the evaluation. The tranquility is in the steadiness of your directed thought and your singleness of preoccupation. When concentration is right, it's really balanced and has all the elements of the path.

This is how you protect the mind so that passion doesn't leak in. When it rains, the rain doesn't come in. In other words, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, ideas: They can come, but they don't have to penetrate the mind. That's the message that the Buddha gives, but it does require work. We're not just letting go, letting go. We're also developing. But it's good work. It's work in a sense of well-being, work where you're not being judged by outside, arbitrary standards. There's no panel of judges holding up signs that say 6.0 or 5.0 or 4.0. You can see for yourself: When the mind is developed, it's more and more protected.

But the important thing is that you get your concentration right. Don't go just for a comfortable hour. Go for an hour where there's lots of mindfulness, lots of alertness—where you have that quality of your entire awareness being focused. And that's how you keep the rain from leaking in.