Truth of Your Focus, The

August 11, 2004

The world is a noisy place. Even this far out at the end of the road, there are still noises around. But if you went around trying to straighten out the noise of the world before you could settle down and train the mind, the mind would never get trained. In other words, we live in an imperfect world. It’s one of the reasons why we’re meditating. There’s no perfect happiness to be found here. We’ve got to train the mind in the midst of imperfection, which means that we have to give it very concentrated attention, not let ourselves get distracted by extraneous things, things outside, and a lot of things inside ourselves as well, thoughts that come in, thoughts that go. There’s a lot to distract us if we let ourselves get distracted. So as we’re sitting here, make up your mind. You’re going to stay with the breath, you’re going to stay with bhutto, whatever your theme of meditation is. That’s all you’re going to give your attention to. Everything else can just come and go as it likes. But you stay right here. Take your stance right here. Because if anything is going to come out of this training, it has to come from taking the proper stance. If you don’t take a stance, you just get blown around, washed around by the currents. We are crossing a river, and there are going to be currents coming down, and things in the currents. Sometimes trees come down the river, submerged. You hardly see them, which is why you have to look for an island. So make a temporary island right here with a concentration. Focus on the breath. Find at least one spot in the body. Where you feel that you can settle in, it feels okay to stay here. It may not be the most blissful or wonderful spot, but it’s okay. It’s good enough for you to stay. Because if you don’t learn how to make do with good enough, you’ll never get things that are better. In other words, you start out with what’s basically good enough, and then you stick with it. And the sticking with it is what allows it to get better, allows it to grow. No matter what else, make sure you’ve got this spot firmly in mind. Then as things develop, don’t let yourself get distracted from this spot. We talk about the good results that come from meditation, a greater sense of ease. Sometimes there’s a feeling of fullness or rapture. Lights can appear. Sometimes visions can appear. These are all distractions. To say nothing of the things that tend to pull us away from the meditation. They’re not related in meditation at all. Thoughts of doubt, thoughts of restlessness, anxiety, sleepiness, ill will, sensual desire. Those things are obvious hindrances. There are two ways of dealing with them. Dealing with the hindrance first and then trying to settle the mind in. Or settling the mind in with the breath holding on there and just using that quality of stillness to fend off the hindrances. Often the most efficient way is the second one. You don’t have to think about taking this tactic, that tactic. Just say, “I’m going to stay right here no matter what comes into the mind. Take my stance right here.” Don’t believe anything you think aside from the thought that says, “I’m going to stay right here. This is where I want to be.” Then take an interest in this spot, because it’s not just sitting there doing nothing. It’s going to be changing in different ways, sometimes changing to get more comfortable. If that happens, try to encourage it in that direction. If it gets less comfortable, stop to see, “What did you do? Can you get that sense of comfort back?” In other words, use all your ingenuity to stay right here. As you get more and more at home here, it’ll be easier and easier to fend off the hindrances, to make less an impression on the mind, to be less attractive. Because we go with the hindrances precisely because there is an allure to them. Sensual desire has the obvious allure, but there’s even an allure to being angry, an allure to drifting off and being sleepy and just saying, “I’m going to be here for the hour, but I don’t really have to be here. I’m just going to blur out.” There’s even an allure to restlessness and anxiety. There’s an attraction. When you can understand why the mind tends to be attracted to these things, then it’s easier to let them go. Because you realize the attraction, the allure, is false. It’s a pretty hollow allure. As for uncertainty, John Lee used to say, “You’re uncertain because you’re not true. You’re always looking for truth outside. This idea, that idea, maybe this teaching, that teaching.” He said, “If you want to find truth, you have to be a true person. To be true, you have to commit yourself to something and stick with it. If you’re here with a breath, you don’t have to doubt the breath. You know that it’s coming in, you know it’s coming out. You know it’s what’s keeping your body alive, so it’s a good thing to be with. Any other doubts that come up, just let them go, let them go. Because if you allow yourself to get eaten up by doubts, there’ll be no truth to you, and you’ll find no truth at all in life. So try to be true right here. Stick with this one spot. Come what may. And tie a knot. Finally they give the example of the red ant that lives in mango trees. They have a nasty bite and a tenacious one. If they bite you, even if you try to pull them off, they’ll just hang on, hang on. Even if you pull them so that their head separates from the body, the head will still be hanging on. That’s the kind of tenacity you want to have in the meditation. Just stick with it. And if you find troubles coming up, just use whatever ingenuity you can. Think of this as something your life depends on, because it does. The life of the mind depends on building good qualities inside. Without those good qualities, without that commitment, you’re lost, just wandering around, floating around, wherever the river may take you. You never get across. So you’ve got this little island right here. It’s kind of like a cofferdam that you set up. You’ve got one little spot here where the river won’t take you away. It’s totally solid. You’re not on the other shore yet, but at least you’ve got a spot where you’re dry and don’t have to be swept away by the currents. And as you find yourself more and more comfortable here, then it’s easier to stay. You can think of letting that sense of comfort spread throughout the body so it’s not just one little spot that you’re holding on to. The whole body becomes your foundation. Think of yourself as having an inexhaustible source of comfort right there. So that even though the sensation spreads, it’s not exhausted in your center. It spreads like, we’re talking this morning, it spreads like a forest spreads. The trees here and then the seeds spread out from the trees and they grow and they get good so they can make their own seeds and then they spread out as well. So that the sense of fullness stays right here in the center that you’ve chosen. It’s not exhausted by you being spread. It just connects up with other similar sensations throughout the body. It’s seeping through soil. The water seeps out through the soil. Parts of the soil may stay as soil and not get turned into water, but there’s a lot of water all around in between them. Then you focus on that, and it’s the truth of your focus. The continuity, the sense of consistency and commitment. That’s what’s going to turn this into true concentration. So establish your beachhead right here and then build from your strength. So when the currents of life come sweeping past, they don’t sweep your way along with them. Think of it, you’re here sitting here meditating and sometimes even a sound, the sound of the earth mover over there, the sound of the plane just now. It can blow you away. Little things can blow you away. What about the big things that are going to happen in life? If you can’t withstand little things, the big things are going to wipe you out for sure. So you start with these little things. If you want, you can think of the body as a big screen, like the screen on a window. The wind blows through, but the screen doesn’t have to be blown away by the wind. It’s another way of thinking of it. But however you conceive it for yourself, make sure you have this quality of steadiness, of taking a stance and maintaining that stance no matter what. Otherwise, the currents of life just carry you off, and who knows where you’re going to go. They don’t tell you beforehand where they flow. In some of the Buddhist teachings, there are all sorts of disasters that happen down the pools. Crocodiles, you run ashore and get snagged. There are waterfalls. You don’t want to let yourself get carried away. But it’s this quality of truthfulness, again, which doesn’t mean saying true things, but it means being true to your commitment that you’re going to stay right here. That’s what will enable you to find the truth.

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