Irresponsibility

September 3, 2004

The mind has a tendency to carry a lot of baggage around. So when you come out to a place like this, it’s good to divest yourself of your baggage. On a trip into the forest, a lot of his students in Bangkok wanted to go along, so they made an arrangement to meet at the main train station. John Fugen himself had been out with the Chan-li many times in the forest and knew that if you went with the Chan-li, you had to carry as little as possible. But a lot of the other people hadn’t been with the Chan-li, so they didn’t know that. Several of them came with two or three suitcases. When they all met at the train station, the Chan-li took one look at everybody and saw all the baggage that everybody had. So instead of getting on the train, he started walking down the tracks. When the Chan-li walks down the tracks, everybody else has to walk down the tracks. So there were people carrying two or three suitcases. Sure enough, they started complaining about why they had to do this. After all, he could see easily that they had so much baggage. Why was he making them do this? First, he didn’t say anything. Finally, he said, “If it’s heavy, throw it away.” He put it down and kept on walking. So people had to stop and sort through their baggage, take out all the unnecessary stuff and throw it into the lotus ponds on either side of the train tracks there in Bangkok. Some of them actually threw suitcases away. When they got to the next train station, everybody’s load was a lot lighter. That’s when the Chan-li allowed them to get on the train. The message is, as a meditator, you want to be as light as possible. So one way of lightening the mind is to remind yourself, when you’re out here, of the things that are not here. You don’t have people pushing their ideas out of you. You don’t have the radio, the advertisements, all the sensory input that’s largely designed to arouse either greed or anger or delusion. That’s not here. Just clean it all out of your mind. All your social entanglements are not here. All you’ve got is the mind and the body sitting here. That’s all. That’s it. You’re surrounded by wilderness. So anything that doesn’t have to do immediately with your mind or your body or the wilderness right around you, clean out of the mind. Clean out of the mind. Clean out of the mind. Each time you breathe in, think of the breath coming in, and then as you breathe out, just clean stuff out. All the nerves of your eyes and ears and your other senses. Each time you breathe in, think of the breath cleaning out all the unnecessary crud that tends to build up, like the crud that builds up in pipes. Breathe in and then just clean it out. Breathe in, clean it out. Not only are you cleaning these things out, but you’re also healing your nerves. The nerves of your eyes and ears and nose, tongue, and body, at the moment, don’t have to take on any outside issues at all. They can just simply sit here and be bathed in the breath. John Lee makes an analogy with fire. He said there’s the fire of greed, anger, and delusion, and that burns your nerves away. There’s also the fire of jhana, mental absorption, strong concentration. He says it’s a different kind of fire. It’s cool. It’s soothing. Instead of wearing down your nerves, it protects them and nourishes them. So you can think of the whole nervous system as a fire. Having nothing to do but be bathed in the breath right now. If the mind tries to use it for any other purpose, you say, “Not now. Not right now.” You don’t have to make reference to anything at all outside of the body. If the mind is complaining, you say, “Where is the entertainment? Where is the fun? Where is the intelligence?” You say, “I don’t need it right now.” There are different kinds of intelligence. It has to think and figure things out. That has its place, but not right now. Except for figuring out ways to clean things out, ways to just stay right here. Your frame of reference is the body in and of itself. It doesn’t have to be the body translated into the world or translated into whatever abstract issues you tend to think in terms of. Just the body sitting here breathing. There’s the presence and the absence. There’s the absence of stress. There’s the presence and absence of pain. That’s it. There’s disturbance and lack of disturbance. You can think in these ways. It’s called dwelling in emptiness. In other words, you don’t have to think in terms of self or not-self or who you are. Any thought that comes into the mind that suggests that you’re such and such a person, you say, “I don’t need that thought right now.” It’s just breath, body, awareness. That’s all. With no history, with no future. Just allow these things to be on good terms here in the present moment. If other thoughts do come into the mind, you don’t have to get angry at them. Just allow them to go away. If you find yourself getting involved, be gentle about pulling yourself away, but firm about pulling yourself away. In other words, you’re trying to create as few issues as possible to give the tools you have here, your senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, face, ideation. You get a chance to rest. They don’t have to take on outside burdens. They don’t have to be responsible for anything else. Everyone needs this kind of quiet place where the body just is a body. Awareness is just awareness. You don’t have to convert it into thoughts. You don’t have to convert it into ideas. Just allow these things to be together in their elemental nature, as they’re experienced right here in the present moment. That’s it. It’s from this perspective that you can see the Dhamma, things as they’re directly experienced. It’s from this position that you’re able to see the Dhamma clearly. In other words, as long as you stay here, you can see things from cause to effect and the connections among them. If you want to see anything at all, you have to be steady. If you’re not steady, if you’re flitting around, the mind flits to this idea, then flits to that idea. It doesn’t see the connections. It can make up connections, like when you’re playing connect the dots. You have a little dot here, a little dot there, and you decide. It’s simply a matter of choice where the lines go. But that’s because you just have dots. That’s why you need the lines. But if you stay right here in the present moment, in the present moment consistently, you’ve got more than dots. The lines are there. You don’t have to fill them in. So this is a good place for the mind to rest. It’s also a good place for the mind to see what’s actually going on. In particular, you start seeing the decisions you’re making. These are the factors that shape your life. And if you’re not right here, they can shape your life underground. In other words, the mind makes decisions, but it’s not totally open with itself about what the decision is or why it’s making the decision. It’s like the people in the back rooms of a political party. A lot of decisions get made, but they don’t want anybody to know why the decisions are made. And where do they get the idea for that? That’s the way the mind acts with itself. So you want to be here, both so you can see the decisions and also, as I said, because this is a nourishing place for your awareness to be. It gives you strength. To be at this spot where there’s nothing you really have to do except just be with things as they are in their elemental nature right here in the present. It’s nourishing. It gives strength to the mind. When the mind has strength, it can make better decisions. One, because it’s clear about what’s happening, and two, it simply has the energy that’s needed to make the right decision, the skillful decision. Because so many times we want to just get things done without having to put too much energy into it. And as a result, our decisions get sloppy. When your decisions are sloppy, the results are sloppy. And the sloppy both for you and for the people around you. This is why abandoning your responsibilities while you’re meditating like this is actually a responsible action, because you’re putting yourself in a position where you can make better decisions and have a better influence on your life and the lives of people around you. It’s like you’re charging your batteries. As long as you keep the charge up, you’ve got plenty of energy. When the charge starts leaking out through your eyes, your ears, your nose, your tongue, your body, thoughts of past and future, and you’re not charging it up, your energy level goes down. The decisions you make get sloppy. You don’t want to make shortcuts. You don’t want to be bothered with a lot of things, difficult issues, complex issues, precisely the issues where skill is required. So take this opportunity to be irresponsible. You don’t have anything else you have to think about, anything else you have to be responsible for. Just simply be here with the sense of the breath, the sense of the body, your basic sense of awareness in the present moment, without making it reference to anything else in your life. And by being irresponsible right now, you find that is the responsible choice, the basis for being truly responsible for your life. Truly responsible for the happiness that you can create, both within yourself and around yourself.

<https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/y2004/040903%20Irresponsibility.mp3>