Creating Reality

December 26, 2004

Make yourself comfortable. In other words, sit in a comfortable posture with your back comfortably straight. Try to keep the different joints in the body relaxed. Your wrists, your knees, your ankles. Don’t tense them up. That’s keeping the body comfortable. Keeping the mind comfortable takes some doing. First, remind yourself that you’re here doing something really good, training the mind in all sorts of good qualities—mindfulness, alertness, concentration, discernment. Then make it at ease with the breath. When the breath comes in, know it’s coming in. When it goes out, know it’s going out. Be on friendly terms with the breath. All too often it’s easy when you’re trying to stay focused on something that, after all, the object seems to become an enemy. It’s not willing to stay in your line of sight. But try not to have that attitude. Remember, after all, the breath is the energy that’s keeping you alive. So be on friendly terms with it. If the mind wanders off, very gently, but firmly, bring it back. And if you’re going to be on friendly terms with something, you have to learn how to listen to it. What kind of breathing feels good right now? You can focus on the breath in any part of the body where it’s easy to see that now the breath is coming in, now the breath is going out. Try to keep the spot where you’re focused comfortable and relaxed, too. Again, there’s a tendency to tense up around something that you’re trying to focus on, but that’s not helpful. You can focus on the tip of the nose, the middle of the chest, the throat. Anywhere you can tell that now the breath is coming in, now the breath is going out, and it feels good. And once it feels good, try to maintain that sense. It’s like surfing, maintaining your balance even as the waves change. After all, the rhythm of breathing that you like right now may not be so comfortable. So you can change that. The needs of the body will change over the course of the hour. What you want to learn how to do is to ride the mind. In such a way that it feels balanced, just right, the breath is coming in just right, going out just right, and you have nothing else that you have to worry about, nothing else you’re responsible for, which allows you to give all your attention to how the breathing is going in the body right now. This is also part of being on friendly terms with something. So the breath giving your full attention. It’s the same with dealing with other people. If you only give them part of your attention, they feel slighted. But if you give them your full attention, it’s easier to be friendly. As for other thoughts that come into the mind right now, you don’t need them. You don’t need to get involved with them. They can go right through you. Just as with sounds or any other distractions that come your way. Just think of yourself as a big screen. These things can go right through the screen without getting caught. The screen doesn’t put up any resistance. It’s not that these distractions are the problems. It’s our reaction to them that causes the problems. If you’re trying to push them out, push them away. You’re spending your time pushing instead of looking at the breath, which again means that you give your full attention to the breath. You have no other responsibilities right now. Be with the breath coming in and going out. This way you can get firmly established in the present moment. All the really interesting things happening in life happen right here. All too often we think otherwise. We think that the interesting things are happening, things that somebody else is doing someplace else, or that we did in the past and we’re going to do in the future. But the way the mind constructs its sense of reality, makes its plans for the present and for the future, that all happens right here. That’s the really interesting thing about life, is how we shape it. The information coming in through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, coming in through TV and radio and magazines and newspapers, is not nearly as fascinating as this whole process of how we create our sense of reality and how we make the choices that shape that reality right here, right now. So if you want to see that process, see those choices as they’re happening, see them as they’re happening, so you can make sure that they’re good choices. You’ve got to get the mind established here in the present moment, and the breath is really good for that. Because when you’re watching the breath, you’re in the present. You know you’re not watching a past breath or a future breath. You’re watching the present breath. Because, as we said in the chant just now, we’re subject to aging, illness, and death. And the only way to find happiness in the midst of those things is through our own actions. Our actions come from the mind, come from the choices we’re making right now. So, if those actions are going to lead to happiness, they have to be careful. They have to be well thought out. They have to be based on skillful intentions. And if you want to know if your intentions are skillful or not, you’ve got to watch right here. When the Buddha taught his teachings on karma, which is basically what intention is all about, when he first taught them to his son, he didn’t talk about huge abstractions. He said, “Just look at what you’re doing, your intentions before you act. Look at the action while it’s happening, the results that are coming while it’s happening, and the results that come afterwards.” It’s a teaching that’s focused very much on the present, very much on what you do, how you shape your life. That’s what the teaching on karma is all about. And it’s all happening right here. Lots of other things happen right here, too, in the present moment. Eventually, death is going to happen right here. And what are you going to do when that’s suddenly the present awareness, the present, when it comes? The Buddha said there’s something deathless. And that can be touched right here as well. If you know the deathless, you can focus on that, and the things that die will just pass away. So this is another good reason to want to stay right here, because there’s lots of interesting things as you peel away all the different layers. We’re not getting into the present moment just to hang out in the present moment. It’s because there are interesting things happening here. There are important things happening right here. And that dimension which doesn’t happen, but it’s there, can be touched right here. That’s here as well. So you’ve got a whole hour in which you have no other responsibilities. Just learn to get acquainted with the present moment. Learn to be on friendly terms with the present moment. When you’re friends with the present moment, it’s a lot easier to stay here. And when you’re on friendly terms with the present moment, it begins to open itself up. It begins to trust you. At first it tests you—pains in your legs, pains in your back, all these other things that come in. It’s like it wants to see if you’re going to be a true friend or not. If you put up with the pains, you learn how to breathe through them. After all, the breath isn’t just the air coming in and out of the lungs; it’s the whole energy flow in the body. The energy flow at the spot that you’ve been focused on feels right there. You can think of it spreading throughout the body, through all the different energy channels. That way you can breathe through the pains. In other words, you don’t build up tension around a pain. And that makes the pains that come when you’re sitting here meditating and your legs are not used to sitting in this folded position for long periods of time. The main blood vessels are going to get blocked, the capillaries suddenly have to take the load of the blood, and it’s going to hurt for a while. But eventually those capillaries expand, so you’re not damaging your legs by sitting here. And the less you tense them up, the less likelihood there will be for the pain to happen. So when you feel confident that you can handle whatever the present moment throws at you throughout this hour, it’s easier and easier to get on friendly terms with it, to keep coming back. As I said, the present moment, when you keep coming back like this, begins to open up. You see your choices as they’re being made. We don’t bury our choices down into the cellar of the unconscious. It’s not like the unconscious is some weird, murky place or weird, murky force. It’s just the choices that we don’t pay attention to, that we let go on automatic pilot. But now, as you’re staying here, as the mind begins to settle down, these things become more tangible, and you feel less and less threatened by them. You’re more willing to look at them. That in and of itself is an important skill, an important development. So have a sense of this time you have to be still with the present moment. All too often, the demands of our jobs, the demands of relationships, tend to crowd in on quiet time like this. It’s not a whole free hour. You can think about all kinds of things. But that’s turning your frame of reference away from the present and into the past and the future. And your decisions aren’t being made in the past and the future; they’re being made right now. So these are the things you want to get to know, because these are the things that change your life. So give all your attention right now. And don’t save some in reserve for the rest of the hour or from other times or other issues. Give everything you’ve got right now, right now, right now. And you’ll find that you’ll be aptly repaid. (crickets chirping)

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