Totally Secure

September 17, 2005

Trying to be true to the breath. There’s competition tonight, but the competition doesn’t destroy the breath. It’s still there. Just find in your body where the sensations of breathing are and stick with them. Look after them. If the breathing doesn’t feel comfortable, you can adjust it. Make it longer, shorter, deeper, more shallow. Whatever feels really good for the body right now. As for everything else, you can let it pass. Basically, it’s not your issue unless you make it your issue. It’s not your karma unless you make it your karma. You have the choice. So just stay right here with the breathing and watch out for when the mind starts leaving the breath. It starts fabricating the other thoughts, other worlds, fabricating the past, fabricating the future. This is one of the things the mind is really good at. Fabrication. The Pali word is sankhara. The problem with this is that it creates a lot of suffering for itself. This is not to say that sankhara, or fabrication, doesn’t serve a purpose. It serves a lot of purposes. It’s because of fabrication that we can think, that we can talk, that we can function. But the problem is that we’re not clear on what we’re fabricating. Sometimes we think we’re creating a nice little thought world for the mind, and it starts to turn on you and develops fangs and comes back and bites you. So you can get it into your head that you want a certain sight or sound or smell or taste or tactile sensation, and you can build it up into something really attractive. And then you find yourself unable to do without it. You’ve got to go out looking for it. And the things you do in the course of looking for it may not be all that helpful. And oftentimes you find that when you actually get what it was that you were looking for, there’s not much there. You’ve gone to all that trouble, created all that suffering for yourself, many times suffering for other people, and you have nothing to show for it. That’s why the Buddha pointed out as one of the major factors in the practice is to understand this process of fabrication. One of the definitions of discernment or wisdom is all around knowing of this process of fabrication. As you start by looking at what you do and what you say, this is why we have the precepts. What are you doing with your body? What are you creating? What are you creating with your words? It’s interesting to reflect that of all the precepts, of all five of the precepts, the one the Buddha placed the most importance on was number four, the one against lying. It’s bad enough when we create fabrications that are a reasonable replica of what’s actually happening, what’s actually true, but so many times we create fabrications that are false. And the more false fabrications we create, the harder it is for us to find the truth. We don’t like to hear lies from other people. But if we lie, two things happen. One is that we’re bound to hear a lot more lies from people around us. And two, after a while, we start losing track of what’s really true and what’s false within our own mind. The mind does have this tendency to hide things from itself, and the more you get involved with elaborating the truth or skewering the truth, the more you have to hide. And then the harder it is to get down to the truth of things inside the mind. So, in terms of the precepts, the Buddha has us be very careful about what kind of world we’re fabricating with our thoughts and our words and our deeds so that, at the very least, it’s not cluttered up with a lot of falsehood. There’s not a lot of denial in the mind, because otherwise, when you sit down to meditate, you start thinking about the things you did and you said, and you don’t like to think about them. But yet, there they are, the elephant in the living room. And if you try to pretend that it’s not there, that just closes off large areas of your own mind that you’re not going to be able to gain any insight into. So this principle of truthfulness is very important. It’s one of those virtues that has a lot of facets to it. Not only do you want to admit the truth about what’s going on inside and things that you’ve been doing outside, but you want to create an environment where the truth becomes clearer, where you’re true. You make up your mind to do something, and you stick with that determination. You want to be true to the practice. Because it’s only by being true to the practice that you find the truth that the Buddha promises, that there is an end to suffering. You don’t get to see that unless you are a true person. This is how concentration gets developed. You really stick with something no matter what. It’s like having a gyroscope. In a ship, no matter which direction the waves tilt, the gyroscope stays on an even keel. No matter what happens outside, no matter what happens inside, you want to keep your mind on an even keel. That requires a quality of truthfulness, both in the sense of being true to your determination and also seeing exactly what’s going on. You find yourself leaning in one direction, leaning towards liking or disliking, leaning towards delusion or leaning towards fear. You can right yourself. Get the mind back in a state where it’s not leaning, so that it always knows what its intentions are. We spend so much time trying to second-guess other people’s intentions that we lose sight of our own. So this is where you want to keep your attention focused, realizing that it’s the fabrications that come from within the mind that are the big problem. What other people fabricate, that’s their issue, your issue. It’s how you maintain your even keel. As you do this, you begin to see the process of fabrication in the mind more and more clearly all the time. That enables you to see through not only false fabrications but also true fabrications. Ultimately, no matter how true a fabrication or false these processes are, they still are processes. They’re still fabrications. They’re still an element of stress involved in them. You want to be able to get the mind above that. But you can’t see their truth if you’re cluttering the mind up with a lot of reasons for denial or half-hearted efforts. This quality of truthfulness is really important. It forms a thread all the way through the practice. You’re sitting here trying to stay with the breath. There’s music outside. Are you going to be true to the breath or are you going to go ranting and raving about the music? You’ve got the choice. But you find that if you stay true to the breath all the way through the hour, you’ll come up with a lot more to show for the hour. And you develop an important habit in the mind. Because no matter how wonderful or extravagant your mental fabrications might be, they always keep running into those basic old facts of aging, illness, and death. The truth always intrudes. And if your fabrications are true, they’re in line with the truth and they’re not threatened by them. In other words, with aging, illness, and death, what you really want is a good, solid state of mind that’s not knocked around by things that can keep its even keel. So if that’s the kind of fabrication you’ve been working on, it’s much less threatened by these three big facts of life. Even more so, and you can use your concentration as a basis for discernment, for insight into the way the mind creates things, fabricates things, all the processes that it runs, to the point where you can stop the process. Then you come across a happiness, come across a sense of well-being that’s not threatened by anything. That’s the kind of truth that isn’t threatened by any other truth. It lies beyond all the truths of fabrication. But until you get there, there’s always a sense of being threatened by this whole series of make-believe worlds that we keep building. It’s so easy for them to come tumbling down. So try to get the mind to a place where it isn’t threatened by the truth. It’s only then that you can be really secure.

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