Unified Committee, A

October 20, 2005

Each person’s mind is like a committee, and each person brings a different committee to the meditation. This is why we all have such different issues as we’re trying to get the mind to settle down. Some members of the committee are willing to settle down, others are a little bit more resistant. The politics within each person’s committee is extremely individual. The way the inner discussion is run, the way each of us has been functioning in life, is very different. In some cases the discussion tends to be repressive, in other cases it tends to be more open and gentle, which means that we have to learn different techniques in learning how to bring the committee down to a state of peace, bring it to unanimity, bring it to oneness. Think about all the things that your mind is registering right now. It’s registering your body, how things feel in the different parts of the body. It’s registering signals that are being sent in from lots of nerve endings. And on top of that, there are the other parts of the brain. One part is being devoted to the breath right now, other parts may be wandering off to the past, wandering off to the future, because that’s what they normally do. And because they can’t go wandering off as they normally do, they may create troubles. So what you’ve got to do is find some way of getting everybody involved. That’s why the breath is such a good topic for meditation, because it deals with your sense of the body here in the present moment. It makes that the main focus. In other words, not just one spot in the body, but you want to be aware of the entire body. As John Lee says, “Out to every pore.” Well, there’s a nerve that leads out to every pore. There’s a blood vessel that goes out there. And so all the nerve endings that are sending messages are supposedly becoming part of this one big hole, W-H-O-L-E, which is not the way they normally function. Many times you focus on this part, then you focus on that part. And whichever part seems to have a pain coming in, something is abnormal, the signals get sent up the nerves pretty fast. And they tend to crowd out the other signals. What you’ve got to do here is learn how to open all the channels and try to make them all as comfortable as possible. And as for particular pains in different parts of the body, you’ve got to learn not to give them prominence. And as you get involved in this process, you give the analytical part of your mind something to work on. Again, it’s right here with the sensations of the body. You get the part of the mind that’s thirsting after pleasure, you give it something to feed on right here. In other words, the effort is directed at getting everybody involved on one project, so they get used to working together. Instead of pushing and pulling and screaming at each other. But because each of us has a different set of rules of order for how the mind works, and the nature of the discussion tends to be different, this is why each of us, as we’re settling in, will have very different experiences as the mind settles into oneness. It’s important that you, if you’re listening to other people talking about their meditation, understand what exactly applies to you and what doesn’t apply to you. And as for the things that don’t apply to you, just let them go. Don’t necessarily try to squeeze your meditation in that direction, because you’ve got a different committee. Whatever technique or whatever strategies you have for getting everybody working together, eventually that’s where you want everybody to settle down. Oneness with the body, here, with the breath, in the present moment. Do your best to keep everybody focused on this one project. There may be scattered thoughts that flicker across the screen every now and then, but try to keep the sense of the screen predominant. So that the thoughts have as little impact as possible. And then learn how to stay one for as long as possible as well. This is a very important skill. Many times when the mind settles down, you say, “Okay, what’s next? I don’t have much time.” Well, that’s a part of the committee that’s ready to move on to another job, and you’ve got to say, “No, we’re going to stay right here. Keep everybody right here.” Because you need to learn the skills on how to stay focused for long periods of time, to stay one for long periods of time, no matter what the situation. They say that people have to work on concentration all the way up to non-returning, which means even though the mind may be able to settle down, you want to teach it how to settle down in all situations. That’s when you can say that you’ve really mastered concentration. It may seem like it’s time, and it may seem like it’s going nowhere, but having this center and keeping it as continuous as possible is what allows insight to happen. It doesn’t come from thinking things out or reading books. Reading books may help every now and then in dealing with specific strategies, getting the mind to settle down, and asking questions. But the state of mind that’s going to make genuine insight or transcendent insight possible is just this one of trying to keep the mind one in all situations. That requires patience. It requires a certain amount of trust and faith. As I said this morning, there are two kinds of truths in the world. There are truths that you simply observe and record, and then there are the truths that are not going to happen unless you make them happen. Concentration is something you have to make happen. The conditions for discernment arising are something you have to make happen. You have to learn how to ask certain questions. That’s a type of fabrication. That’s something you have to put together. That’s something you have to make happen. And all of that depends on conviction. You have to be convinced in the worth of concentration. One of the passages we chant, “One who is ardent with respect for concentration.” Respect, faith, trust—they all go together. You have to trust the concentration. It may not seem obvious how it’s going to give rise to insight or when it’s going to give insight. But you have to trust that it’s going to happen. This is the condition that you have to learn how to master. One way of mastering is to have continued trust in what you’re doing. Otherwise, it won’t come into being. So learn to appreciate the value of oneness, stillness of the mind. The mind that’s in a position where it doesn’t have to think, it’s going to have to figure everything out all the time, where it’s content to stay still. Maintain that stillness. Devote itself entirely. Get everybody on the committee working together on maintaining that stillness and keeping it alive. In Chan Kham Di, one of Ajahn Mun’s students made the comparison with being a hunter. Hunters go out and they have to sit very still, but be very alert at the same time. They know they have no idea when the rabbit’s going to come by. But they do know that if they move around too much, the rabbit’s not going to come anywhere near. Or if they doze off for even a moment, they’ll miss the rabbit. So although you can’t guarantee that you’ll have the rabbit by noon or by 3 p.m. or whenever, this is the only way you’re going to be able to catch the rabbit. So do you. Do what you can so that you’re ready for the rabbit whenever it comes.

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