Settling in Snugly

September 23, 2011

As you go through the day, the mind has this tendency of casting out lines with hooks on the end. It grabs onto this thing, grabs onto that thing. If you take a picture of your mind at the end of the day, it’d be like that picture of Gulliver and Gulliver’s Travels, captured by the little Putians. All these lines, these ropes, tying them down to the ground. And so if you find that that’s the case, and you sit down to meditate, you’ve got to do a lot of cutting, learning how to see your day-to-day attachments. Some of them would be best cut for good, the things you were looking at that attracted your attention, the things you were listening to with desire or anger. So do what you can to cut them. Remind yourself of the drawbacks of having those kinds of attachments, where they can pull you. It’s bad enough for the various places they can pull you in the course of this lifetime, but they can also pull you in ways that go beyond this lifetime. If you see anything in the mind that would lead to an attachment, a desire to be a certain kind of person, living in a certain kind of place, you’ve got to learn how to cut that. Because it can lead you in all kinds of weird directions and pull you on, pull you on. It’s the way the mind’s been being pulled on for such a long time. Then there are the attachments that you’re going to have to pick up again and again. Pick them up again as you leave the meditation areas where you’re responsible, work you have to do. Even those things you’ve got to learn how to let go, at least for the time being. Otherwise, the mind’s not going to be able to get to know itself. It spends all of its time knowing other things. But as long as those things pull your attention outside, you’re not going to be able to look deeply inside and get really familiar with what’s going on in here. Because it’s only when you’re familiar with the different processes in the mind that you can actually do something about them. Otherwise, your mind is huge, unknown territory, like those old maps from the seventeenth century. All they had were coastlines, and they were in the interior a big blank area. So as we meditate, we want to learn how to explore that blank, like the explorers in the nineteenth century who finally decided it would be worth their while to go up those rivers and climb those mountains, explore the jungles and peer into the canyons. Learn about what was in there. So try to peel your interest with things outside away for the time being. Put it aside. Think of it as a mask that you peel off your face. You may have to put it on again at some point, but right now you don’t have to. Come to the meditation as if you didn’t have any narrative of who you’ve been for the past days, weeks, months, years. Take the attitude of simply an awareness right here, curious about what’s going on. And particularly curious about the mind’s habit of creating little worlds and then going off with them to figure out why the mind does that. Part of it has to do with the way it’s looking after the body. But for the time being, the body is sitting here in a way that you don’t have to look after very much. Just be with the breath. As for the body’s other needs, just let them go. And learn to explore the energy here in the body as a way of anchoring your attention here. Because if you try to come to the present moment without really being interested in it, you’re not going to stay. And so the interest here is, what can this energy in the body do for you? Give the mind a good place to stay, a comfortable, refreshing place to stay. And as the energy gets more all around, as it’s allowed to circulate without a lot of conflict inside, it’s good for the body. It’s good for your health. If you have any particular pains or injuries that you have to look after, think of the energy going through the shell that you’ve built up around those pains and injuries. It’s circulating around, airing things out. And don’t think that just one or two breaths is going to take care of everything. It’ll take a while, so you want to stay with this healing energy. Give it time to do its work and allow it to do something else. And do some work on the mind as well, because the mind has lots of shells and resistance. And allow the energy to dissolve some of those away as well. This way you’ll find it easier and easier for the mind to settle in. As the mind settles in more and more solidly, you find that there are other more subtle levels of energy. Not only physical energy, but also mental energy. You want to put yourself in a place where you can actually see those clearly. So the more refined the breath, the more you’ll be able to see. Just allow the breath energy to fill the body. Think of all the different parts of the body connecting up and being nourished by this energy so that you don’t have to put so much work into the breathing. You’re not disturbed by the breathing. So that even this attachment places less and less sense of burden on the mind. You want to see this carefully. You want to see this clearly. And realize the extent to which all the different levels of fabrication going on in the body and the mind can contribute to bringing the mind to a state of real peace. I was talking with someone yesterday who’d been doing a noting practice in such a way that things just happened and you simply noted what happened. But as he said, he didn’t have any sense of how he could bring about any particular state or maintain it. Sometimes nice states of concentration came up and it seemed like a nice bonus, but then they would go. He had no way of knowing how they came and how they went, because the meditation wasn’t aimed at making you see how these things come and how they go. You simply see, well, they arise and they just pass away, and that’s as far as you carry them, as far as you take the issue. But the Buddha taught us to get the mind concentrated in a way that makes use of these processes of fabrication so we can understand them better, bring about the skillful states more and more reliably, so you can make use of them more consistently and gain more and more understanding of the mind. So concentration is really an essential element of the path. All the factors of right concentration are really important for giving a sense of well-being in the present moment, allowing you to look at your other attachments and see how ephemeral they are, at least the objects of the attachments. The process of attachment is really persistent. But you begin to see that the way you latch on to things gets you connected with all kinds of things that are going to change on you that you can’t rely on and don’t really provide the satisfaction you’re looking for. As the Buddha said, without the pleasure of concentration, you’re not going to be able to give up your attachment to those other pleasures. So concentration is an essential part of the practice. I was talking to someone over the weekend who was trying to list the dangers of concentration, one of them being that people might get psychic powers which they might abuse. Well, the danger doesn’t come from the concentration. It comes from your attachment to sensuality that’s still lurking around, which would cause you to abuse those psychic powers. The danger isn’t with the concentration. It’s with the attachments that we still haven’t been able to let go of. And those attachments aren’t going to go away if you are afraid of concentration and try not to practice it. So as the Buddha said, learn how to settle in here. Learn how to indulge in the sense of well-being that comes from the concentration. There will be some point where you learn how to outgrow this need for this kind of indulgence. But even those who are awakened use concentration as a comfortable abiding. So learn how to make this your comfortable abiding right now. You can cut all those other little lines of attachment. You find that the mind curls in on itself. The different parts of your awareness fit together snugly, and it all feels just right. So if you notice anything that pulls you away from this sense of inner snugness, just cut cut cut cut right through so that the mind really can become one with itself and heal itself in the process.

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