Three Kinds of Fabrication (outdoors)

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When we’re developing mindfulness, it’s important to realize what mindfulness is, because there are so many definitions out there that it’s easy to misunderstand. Mindfulness doesn’t mean just watching what’s happening in the mind. It doesn’t mean accepting what’s happening in the mind. Mindfulness actually is a faculty of the memory. You’re trying to remember what you’re here to do. Remember that you have your duties. If unskillful thoughts come up in the mind, you want to let go of them. If skillful qualities come up in the mind, you want to develop them so that they grow and become strong. Remembering that and keeping it in mind all the time, that’s the function of mindfulness. No one’s imposing these duties on you. Even the Buddha didn’t try to impose these duties on anybody. He just simply noted that if you want to put an end to suffering, this is how it’s done. There’s no other way. You have to realize that you are responsible for shaping the shape of your mind. Past actions may come in as a result of your past actions. That’s called old karma. That may be something you can’t help, but what you can help is what you do with them. It’s like your past actions provide you with raw material, but it’s up to you now how you’re going to shape that material. An important part of shaping the material into a path to the end of suffering is to bring the mind into concentration. So you try to remember the things that bring the mind to stillness, that need to be encouraged, and also remember that there are things that are going to get in the way. The things that get in the way are sensual desire, ill will, sloth and drowsiness. Restlessness and anxiety and uncertainty. Any of these things come up in the mind, you’ve got to ward them off. As for the good things that come in, there’s mindfulness, the ability to analyze what’s going on in your mind in terms of skillful and unskillful. Persistence, rapture or refreshment. Calm, concentration, equanimity. So there are the things to be avoided and the things to develop. So remembering that, that’s the function of mindfulness. And remembering to identify things in the mind as they come up. Don’t think that when a thought comes into the mind, “This is my thought, this is what I believe.” Step back from it for a bit and ask yourself, “What kind of thought is this? Is this a thought of ill will? Is this a thought of analysis of quality? Is this a thought of drowsiness? Is this a thought of restlessness?” You have to learn how to recognize these things. If you don’t recognize them, you won’t be able to follow your duties properly. So at the very least, try to recognize when something comes up in the mind, is it skillful or not? When you’re trying to get the mind into concentration, the basic rule is if it’s related to the breath or if it’s related to your mind in the present moment, then it’s okay. That’s a thought to be developed. If it’s pulling you away from those things, that’s a thought to be dropped. So remember those duties because it’s all too easy to forget. A thought comes up and you just go right into the thought. You believe it, you follow it along, and it pulls you away. Thoughts of sensual desire come up. We very rarely think, “Oh, this is a hindrance. I’ve got to let it go.” We just go in for it. We say, “We enjoy it.” If a thought of ill will comes up, you want to see somebody suffer, and you can think about all the reasons why you would want to see that person suffer. You’ve forgotten. You’ve lost your mindfulness at that point. Mindfulness should recognize, “This is a thought of ill will. This is not needed right now. This is not skillful right now. Drop it.” When you drop it, if it doesn’t go away immediately, don’t worry. You can just go back to the breath. There’s room enough in your mind for that thought and for your paying attention to the breath. Don’t get upset if these thoughts hang around. It’s like you have lots of people in a large room. Some people are engaged in conversation, but you don’t have to join in their circle. They’re over in one corner talking away, but you can be in your corner working with the breath. So we have three qualities. Mindfulness, and then there’s alertness, watching what’s actually going on. Then there’s a quality called ardency, which is when you try to do this well. When you’re doing it well, that means you have to understand that you can shape your present moment, your experience in the present moment, through a process that’s called fabrication. There are three kinds of fabrication. There’s the bodily fabrication, and verbal fabrication, and mental fabrication. Bodily fabrication is the breath. And as you notice, you can breathe in lots of different ways. It’s one of the few bodily processes that you can control, that you can change simply with a thought. Then there’s verbal fabrication. That’s the way the mind thinks to itself. It talks to itself in sentences. In technical terms, this is called directed thought and evaluation. The directed thought is when you pick a topic to think about. Evaluation is when you talk to yourself about it, saying this is this and that’s that, good or bad, whatever. Ask questions, make comments. All the conversation that goes on in the mind, that’s called verbal fabrication. And then finally, there’s mental fabrication. It’s feelings and perceptions. Feelings here doesn’t mean emotions, it means feeling tones, like a feeling tone of pleasure, a feeling tone of pain, or a feeling tone of neither pleasure nor pain, a middling feeling. And perceptions, these are the labels that the mind applies to things. It can be either an image in the mind or a single word. It identifies this as this or that as that. And these three kinds of fabrication, all taken together, these are the things that shape your mind. So if you find that the mind is engaged in something unskillful, look at how you’re breathing. Can you breathe in a way that makes your mind less likely to want to go for that unskillful thought? This is why we meditate on the breath, to learn how to make the breath comfortable. So when the body needs a sense of fullness or the mind wants a sense of fullness out of the body, you can breathe in a way that feels full, feels refreshing, energizing when you feel tired, relaxing when you feel tense. And sometimes you notice, simply by changing the way you breathe, the mind is in a much better shape suddenly, already, without you having to do much other work. Sometimes you have to look at precisely how you’re framing the issue in your mind. How are you talking to yourself about the issue? Can you talk in a different way? For example, if all you can think about is the bad things that somebody has done, and you find yourself getting angry at the person, well, can you think of some of the good things they’ve done? Can you change the topic? Especially when you’re sitting here meditating, you want to think in very long terms. If the face of somebody appears in your mind right now, just wish them goodwill. Say, “I’m here doing my business, looking after my mind. May you be happy, and may we go our separate ways.” And you get back to the breath. Then finally, there’s mental fabrication. Those perceptions are especially important. For example, when you’re dealing with the breath, if the perception is the breath can only come in and out through the nose, then it’s going to be very restricted. You breathe in, and it feels like the body’s not getting enough energy from the breath. But if you hold an image in the mind that the breath can come in and out from all directions, all over the body, think of your body like being a large sponge. As you breathe in, you’ve got holes all over the body, and they all connect inside. So when you breathe in, the breath energy comes in and fills the entire body. It comes in from all directions, fills the entire body. When it goes out, it goes out easily. It comes in, comes in easily. And if you doubt that the breath can do that, think of those statues they tried to make on Laguna Beach. They put people on the stage. They painted them white to look like marble statues. And they found that if they covered the entire body, the statues would faint. They weren’t getting enough oxygen. In other words, the breath coming in and out of the nose was not enough. They needed the oxygen coming in through the skin as well. So they discovered if they left the back of the statue unpainted, then the people would be okay. So our body does breathe in and out through all the pores. So hold that perception in mind. Try to develop a state of mind that’s large throughout the body, that the breath is coming in and out through the whole body, and your awareness is there filling the whole body as well. Hold those perceptions in mind and see what it does. If you’re mindful to keep them there and alert to notice when you’re dropping them so you can remember again, you find that this effort really does give results. You’re here in the present moment. You’ll notice that when the mind slips off to the past or future, it gets very small and zips after thought. But if you keep it large, large, large like this, it’s too big to go to the past or the future. You’re fully inhabiting the present moment. And it’s in this way that you can create a skillful state of mind right here. Now in the beginning it may not be 100%, maybe 40%, but don’t get upset. Remember your mind is like a committee and maybe not everybody is on board to begin with. But if you look after that 40%, take good care of it, then you start winning over other members because the sense of well-being that comes with being settled down and not having to move anywhere at all, it begins to seep through the entire mind. Other members of the committee get attracted. They’re willing to settle down, be right here. As for your doubting and uncertain voices, put them aside. They’re just committee members that want to do something else. They’ll find any excuse. So you don’t have to believe them. And you don’t have to side with them. If you side with them, you’ve lost your mindfulness. Your mindfulness is there to remind you, okay, those things are things to be abandoned. No matter how true they may seem, you’re going to create a new truth here with your concentration. It’s like looking after a child. Suppose your baby is born and it’s sickly. You don’t take it back to the hospital and say, “I want a new one.” You don’t throw it away. You take care of your sickly baby. You do whatever is needed. You take care of it properly, it becomes strong, it becomes healthy. So take care of your concentration. Take care of your state of mind. Right now, it’s the same way you would take care of a child. After all, it is your state of mind. No one else can look after it for you. No matter what’s going on out in the world, your primary responsibility is right here. If you keep your state of mind in good shape, it means that your contribution to the world is a good contribution. If you abandon this for thinking about something else, okay, who’s going to look after it for you? And if you don’t look after it now, when are you going to look after it? It doesn’t get easier as time goes on. So give this moment your full attention. Remember your duties, be mindful, be alert to what you’re doing and the results you’re getting. And as you try to create something better here in the present moment, think of those three kinds of fabrication to give you guidance as to what might be wrong and what you can correct. So you’re getting the fullness of mind that you’re trying to develop. That puts you in a position where you can actually see clearly, even deeper into the mind. But as for how it’s going to develop in the future, leave that to the future. You’re responsible just for the present right here, right now.

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