Heightened Mind (outdoors)

August 9, 2018

The world is swept away. It does not endure. It offers no shelter. There’s no one in charge. It has nothing of its own. It’s a rough place. Yet we still have the desire, “May I be happy.” What this means is that we can’t look to the world for our happiness. We have to look inside. This is why we train the mind. Because it is possible to find happiness here. This is not to say there are not good things out in the world, but they do get swept away. And there are lots and lots of dangers. We’ve been getting a lot of questions about whether we’re safe from fire here. Well, we’re currently safe from the fires that are burning, but we have no idea when a fire could start nearby. The conditions are there. And to bring things even closer, inside your body, the conditions for dying are in here as well. As John Fund says, “The whole body is made up of germs.” The germs have gotten together. Some of them will do what you want, and some of them don’t. And the conditions for malfunctioning are all in place. So we’ve got to look into the mind. We’ve got to raise the level of the mind so it’s not constantly spinning around with the world. The Buddha talks about developing heightened virtue, heightened mind. Heightened discernment. Heightened virtue is when you’re really careful about your precepts. Heightened mind is when you get the mind in a concentration. Because instead of looking for our pleasures in the world and the pleasures of sensuality, we think about getting the mind into the level of what’s called form, how you feel the body from within, which is really not part of the world because it’s your own personal territory. Nobody else can feel your body from within, even if they stick their hand down through your mouth. What they’re feeling is their hand. The feeling from within is how you sense the body. How you sense your own mind in ways that nobody outside can detect. This is where the Buddha says we can look for true happiness. Or at least we can look for the path, try to create the path that will lead to true happiness by settling in here. So you follow his instructions for mindfulness. Sometimes people think that mindfulness practice is one thing, concentration, meditation practice is something else. But the Buddha’s instructions for establishing mindfulness are precisely his instructions for how to get the mind into concentration. You keep track of one thing, in this case the breath, in and of itself. In other words, you’re not concerned with how it relates to the world outside. You’re ardent. You’re trying to get the mind to stay here, alert, noticing what it’s doing, noticing what you’re doing, the results you’re getting. Mindful, trying to remember to stay here so you don’t lose your frame of reference. Putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. In other words, lift your mind up above the level of the world so it doesn’t have to spin around with the world. In John Lee’s images, he says when something is spinning around, there has to be something in the middle that doesn’t spin. So try to find this quality in the mind that’s not spinning with the world, that’s just with the mind in and of itself, with your sense of the body in and of itself. Try to bring body and feeling of pleasure and your awareness into a state of oneness where they fill all the same territory. In other words, a sense of ease runs through the body, your awareness runs through the body. Look into your breath so you can find the source for that sense of ease. And when you find it, think of it spreading out in whatever way seems to make sense to you. And when the mind can stay here, then it’s not concerned about things outside. You could say that you’re in a different world. You’re in a different world, the world inhabiting just inside your body. And you want to get used to being here. Because it’s only when the mind is settled in here that, as the Buddha said, you can really be free from your fascination with sensuality. You can have the discernment that sees that thoughts about sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations have their drawbacks. But if you don’t have an alternative source of pleasure, you’re just going to keep going back to those things with their drawbacks. So this is how getting the mind into concentration lifts the mind above the world and gives it a heightened quality. So it’s happiness that doesn’t depend on things in the world being just a certain way. I mean, think about it. The world is so changeable. And if your happiness depended on things being just right, where would you live in the world? There’s always something in excess. There’s always something lacking. And your idea of a perfect world may not be anyone else’s idea of a perfect world. So there’s going to be conflict. So what you want is a quality of mind that can live in the world however the world is and not be suffering from it. So we make the mind something separate, a sense of being here inhabiting the body, even though this world, too, will someday end. At least this gives you the foundation you need in order to develop heightened discernment, the discernment that sees through why the mind creates suffering and how it can stop. But to see those processes, the mind’s got to be really, really still and has to put aside its concerns with things outside so it can focus real attention on what’s going on in the mind. How does the mind work? What are these processes of the mind? If the mind is focused outside, it’s using these processes but it doesn’t have any good sense about them because the focus is out there. But now we’re focusing inside. How does your mind work? When it focuses on something, how does it focus? When it stays with something, how does it stay? When it moves, why does it move? You want to look into these things because it’s in this area where heightened discernment gets developed. So focus on heightening the mind. As Ajaan Lee says, developing virtue, concentration, and discernment is like building a bridge across a river. The posts on this side of the river and that side of the river are relatively easy. It’s the ones in the middle that require a lot of work. The ones in the middle, of course, are concentration, the state of the heightened mind, as the mind so easily slips back to its old ways. This is where we have to practice again and again and again to get the mind used to being here so that this feels like the normal place to be. The thoughts of sensuality begin to seem strange. Because you’ve got something so much better. You’ve got something on a higher level here. We say that not to get you to feel proud about it, but to make you realize you really are in a much better position. Otherwise you’re chasing the world around wherever the world spins. And it’s very easy to get dizzy that way. The spinning of the world is not innocent. It’s like the spinning of gears in a machine. If you’re not careful, you get a sleeve or some other part of your clothing stuck in the gears and it pulls you in, pulls you in, pulls you in. If you don’t let go, it’s going to squash you. So try to lift the mind above the world. Keep yourself from getting squashed.

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