Rest & Work (outdoors)

October 21, 2018

Take a couple of good, long, deep, in-and-out breaths. Take a couple of good, long, deep, in-and-out breaths and see if you can stay with that sensation. The mind usually thinks, “Well, the breath is taken care of. It can go on its own. It doesn’t need me. I can go someplace else.” But that’s the whole problem. The mind is going to go someplace else. It’s not watching what’s happening right now. Your life is being shaped right now. The way you talk to yourself, the images you have in your mind, even the way you breathe, this is shaping your life. But all too often we don’t want to do the work that needs to be done. We want to go off and play. We’ve learned that we can create whole worlds in our minds and go travel around. And there’s some entertainment to be found there. But in the meantime, the work doesn’t get done. The work of cleaning out the mind so that it doesn’t lie to itself. So that it’s not a traitor to its own best interest. The big battle in the mind is between long-term happiness and short-term happiness. Short-term is quick, and that’s its appeal. It doesn’t take too much. You can think about a few things you know you like to think about and there you are. But then you’re left with nothing. The Buddha compares most of our thinking to dreams. You wake up and everything that was in the dream is gone. And even when we’re planning for the future or thinking about the past, there are times when it’s useful, but there are also times when we’re just wasting our time thinking about the wrong things in the future and the wrong things in the past. It’s not getting done. We like to think that we work as we go through the week, and then when the time comes to meditate, then we can rest. And there is a way that you do rest. In fact, you have to rest first. Settle down with a breath. Feel at ease with a breath. Breathe in a way that feels good. When you’ve rested, you don’t just stay there. We don’t rest for the sake of resting. We rest so that we can work well, work clearly, looking into the mind. Why is it that the mind lies to itself? It’s like a little kid. I’m going to go up here, and at first it may sound okay, but then from here you go to there, from there over there. It’s like a little kid that runs out to do an errand. And then it just uses that as an excuse to go all over town. We don’t like to think that there’s work to be done inside, but that’s where the danger is and that’s where the work needs to be done. There’s some greed in here, there’s some anger in here, there’s delusion in here. And if you don’t watch out, they take over. They can sneak up on you and make you do and say and think things that you’re later going to regret. So the potential is in here, but there’s also potential for something good that needs to be developed. Last time around we were talking about the hindrances in the mind. Well, there are also some friends in the mind. The Buddha calls the factors for awakening. You think of them as factors that make you come to your senses. The first is mindfulness. Getting your awareness established right here with the breath coming in, going out, and remembering to stay here. Remembering that anything that comes up that’s going to pull you away from the breath is something you want to avoid, something you want to abandon. If you catch yourself wandering off, you just come right back. It’s the job of alertness together with mindfulness. And then there’s what the Buddha calls analysis of qualities. When you recognize something that comes up in the mind, whether it’s skillful or not. For instance, a sensual desire comes up and for the most part we don’t think, “Hey, hindrance.” We think, “Ah, this is an opportunity for some fun.” You go with it. You recognize what’s skillful and what’s unskillful in the mind. That helps pull you out. Anything that would lead to your long-term welfare and happiness, that’s something you want to encourage. Anything that leads in the other way is something you want to discourage. You learn how to think in those terms, what’s helpful and what’s not. Instead of what’s enjoyable and what’s not enjoyable, it’s what’s worthwhile and what’s not. Think in those terms. Instead of thinking about what I like to think about right now, as opposed to what you don’t like to think about right now, think about things in terms of what in the long term is going to be good. What’s a good use of this time right here? When you analyze the qualities in your mind in this way, then the next step is to try to develop the skillful ones and abandon the unskillful ones. That’s the third factor of awakening. It’s called persistence. You have to recognize that certain things in the mind are kind of like dirt in the mind, and you want to clean out the mind. There’s a part of the mind that says, “Hey, dirt is natural.” Well, yes, it’s natural, but all kinds of things are natural. Death is natural. Illness is natural. Greed, aversion, and delusion are all natural. The question is, are they good for you? So realize that certain things have got to be cleaned out, and as you clean them out, there’s a sense of well-being that comes into the mind. You’re sitting here and the mind is very still, at ease. It comes without a sense of refreshment. That’s the fourth quality. So breathe in a way that’s refreshing. Deal with your mind in a way that you feel refreshed and clear. That gives rise to a sense of calm in the mind. From the calm, the mind can get concentrated. Those two are factors for awakening. You realize right now there’s no other place you have to go right now, and there’s no other responsibilities. You’re not taking on any other issues. It’s just you, awareness, the breath, right here in the present moment, nothing else. You’re fully here. And for the time being, what’s happening in the past, what’s happening in the future, you can put that aside. You don’t have to weigh the mind down with these things all the time. There will come times when you have to think about the future, think about the past. But right now, all you have to do is just be aware of the present. This is where you give the mind time to be its own person. To look after itself, not have to take on any other responsibilities. So see if you can get the mind into this clear state. It starts with mindfulness and goes through recognizing which qualities in your mind are your friends and which ones are not. Encouraging the friends, discouraging the qualities that are not friendly. And then when the unfriendly qualities of the mind, even though they may be pleasant and smile at you and talk to you nicely, still you realize, “These are not my friends.” Once they’re out of the place, then there’s a great sense of relief. You can trust what’s remaining and you can settle down, be clear, open, equanimous. This is a place for the mind to rest. This is a place for the mind to gather its strength. And when you’ve gathered your strength, then there’s the work that needs to be done. Because you know that the things that would disturb the mind, it’s not that they’ve gone away forever, they’re just hiding out for the time being. So you have to watch. When are they going to come up? When they come up, why? Where are they going to take you? Why do you go with them? Why do you like them? It’s when you can see these things just as they’re beginning that you begin to understand why the mind falls for them and why it doesn’t have to. You choose to go with these things. They don’t suddenly take over without any cooperation on your part. You’re cooperating and you want to see that. That’s the work that needs to be done. Seeing what you’re doing to cooperate with your unskillful qualities. It’s like knowing there are thieves that are going to come in and steal from you. And so you open the door for them, put big signs in and say, “Okay, the treasure’s over here. This is the combination to the lock.” So, of course, they’re going to come in and steal everything. It’s because you’ve made things easy. So you want to check for yourself and see, when exactly do you do that? You do that and then you tend to forget. Again, this is part of the way the mind lies to itself. It paves the way for greed, aversion, and delusion, and then it pretends that it hasn’t. It’s like a cat going along a mantel. It goes along the mantel and knocks over a vase. Then it pretends like nothing happened. It sits there and licks its paw. You want to see why the mind does this to itself. It’s because it wants that instant pleasure. Where does it look for that pleasure? Why does it go for it, even when it knows that in the long term it’s going to burn? That’s the work you’ve got to do. But it is work that we do with a sense of well-being, because to do it well you have to be pretty relentless, just keep at it, at it, at it again and again, questioning what comes up in the mind. You can’t do that unless the mind is really still and has a sense of feeling secure in the present moment. So, yes, this is a place to rest, a place to gather your strength. And, yes, there is work to be done. And the trick is learning how to do both of them together. That’s when you get the most out of your meditation. You come out rested and you also come out with some understanding about yourself. You learn how to see through the mind’s subterfuges so that as you go through the course of the day you can recognize, “Oh, there’s another one, there’s another one. This is how I trick myself. This is how I get myself to do and say and think things that I later don’t like, but at the moment I felt like doing it.” That’s when you come to see how the mind is creating its own problems, creating all the problems that really weigh it down. That’s when you gain wisdom. That’s when you gain discernment. As long as you see that your problems with other people, “This person acts like this, and that person acts like that, and it’s making me upset,” you’re missing the whole point. The whole point is, why do you let it make you upset? And why is that person acting that way? Sometimes you have to look at your own behavior. So this ability to look inside and be willing to straighten out yourself inside, that’s the basic attitude you have to bring to the practice. And the meditation is what allows you to see clearly exactly how to do that so you can do it effectively. So the mind is no longer a traitor to itself, no longer lies to itself. It actually becomes your own refuge.

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