Developing & Letting Go (outdoors)

July 28, 2019

When you meditate, it’s not just a matter of letting go. You also have to build. The word meditation in Pali, bhavanah, means just that, to build, to develop, to make something happen. In this case, we’re making, trying to make concentration happen. It’s going to require both insight and tranquility. We sometimes believe that you do tranquility meditation for a while, and then you switch over to insight. But the Buddha said, ideally, you do the two of them together. And it’s not like there’s a tranquility technique and an insight technique. The basic technique is right mindfulness, which leads to right concentration. You’re focusing on the breath in and of itself. You’re ardent, you’re alert, you’re mindful. The ardency, the alertness, the mindfulness, these are things you have to develop. And as you stay focused on the breath, it’s going to turn into right concentration, a sense of well-being, a sense of ease, fullness, spreading through the whole body, as the mind settles down. This sort of thing is not going to happen on its own. There is some letting go you do in order to get here. In other words, you let go of any disturbances that may come your way. This is where you have to use some insight to get the mind into concentration. Sensual desire comes your way, you say, “No, I don’t believe that that’s something I really want to go with.” Because the problem with these hindrances is that we tend to side with them. As soon as they arise, the sensual desire arises, “Yes, that really is something attractive.” Ill will arises, “That person really deserves to suffer.” Sloth, drowsiness arises, “Yeah, I really do need to sleep.” And so on down the line. You have to learn how to question these things. The questioning is what’s going to give rise to your insight. And the fact that you’re trying to get the mind still, that’s what enables you to recognize things as obstructions to begin with. Otherwise, it’s just part of the normal sloshing around in the mind. And so when you’ve made up your mind, you’ve got to stay with one thing, that you begin to notice how many things go through the mind. So you focus on this one thing. As for the other things, you can let them go. If they’ve seized your attention, you question them until you realize they’re gone. If they’re in the background, just leave them in the background. Some people spend all their time trying to chase down everything in the mind, and they end up spending the whole hour chasing things down. Or the best way is to say, “I really don’t need to go there.” Think of it as a crazy person coming to talk to you. If you get involved in the crazy person’s conversation, they pull you more and more and more into their world. Even if your intention is to chase the crazy person away, they’ve got you. So instead, you pretend that the crazy person’s not there. The crazy person will say some really outrageous things to get your attention, but you have to tell yourself that nothing coming out of this crazy person is worth reacting to in any way at all. After a while, they get tired of dealing with you, and then they’ll start going away. It’s the same with the thoughts in the mind. They’re used to attracting your attention. When they find that they can’t, then they’re going to get a little bit more outrageous. But you have to be firm with them. You’re going to hold on to the breath no matter what. And after a while, they’ll subside. So you have to have this sense of a center where the mind belongs, the one topic you’re going to stay on. You’ve got to build that, you’ve got to develop that, if you really want to have a good foundation. Then as the foundation gets really strong, then you can continue the questioning. Well, this time the questioning gets a little bit more subtle. Is there still something in this center that’s still a disturbance? Can you sense the disturbance coming or going? When it comes, what did you do? When it goes, what did you do? This, too, is work. This, too, is something you have to develop, this attitude of questioning. But it’s questioning for the sake of letting go. You know when you’ve got the right answer to the question, when something that’s been weighing on the mind suddenly disappears. Because you’ve seen what you were doing to apply that weight to the mind. So letting go doesn’t mean, “I don’t care, I don’t care.” Whatever happens. You’re developing stillness in the mind. It’s work that you’ve got to do. And you’re letting go of anything that’s going to disturb that stillness. And the insights that let go, they’re just simply going to get more and more refined as this center gets more and more still. So the two processes go together. And it’s important that you understand that. Because it’s only when they go together that they really get the work done.

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