Stop Eating Roadkill

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The mind has its food, just as the body has its food. The Buddha delineated three kinds. There’s the food of sensory contact, the food of consciousness, and the food of your intentions. Contact, of course, has to do with things coming in from outside. Consciousness and intentions, those are the things that you bring. That’s the food that you create. The problem with the mind is that it gobbles down everything that comes its way. Of course, there’s going to be good things and bad things. And if you regard everything as food, you’re going to get sick. Think of a child going across the floor. A child comes across a ball, comes across a little toy car, comes across something left behind by the dog. If it eats everything that it comes across, it’s going to get sick. Sometimes it vomits stuff up and then it eats that, too, if it has no common sense. Common sense is that some things are edible and some things are not, and you have to learn over time. Sometimes we’re able to take that attitude toward the world, realizing the world is not going to be the way we want it to. But we have a lot of trouble taking that attitude to our own minds, the food that we create. As I was saying this morning, the Buddha said that we go around with craving as our companion, and every little craving that comes up, we feed on. We claim and then we suffer. It’s interesting that in Pali the word for clinging is the same as the word for taking sustenance and the word for the sustenance itself. So in our eating habits, we’re suffering. The first step in not suffering is learning how to eat selectively. And a good way to do that is to give the mind better things to feed on. Again, you create them yourself. You can’t wait for just the best contacts to come in from outside, and then feed on healthy food. You’ve got food coming from within. In a John Lee’s image, it’s like having land of your own, and you can grow your own crops for a big acre of land. So there’s the four elements of the body, the properties of the body. The big one, of course, is the breath. There’s a lot to feed on here. The way you breathe can be very refreshing, very nourishing. Try to think of the breath in a way that’s as comfortable, but also as interesting as possible. A lot of people have trouble with breath meditation because they don’t see the breath as interesting. It’s just the in and out, in and out, maybe a few variations. But when you start thinking about it, it’s the energy that flows down through the tiniest blood vessels, the tiniest nerves. It nourishes the different organs of the body. It helps with your posture. If you breathe right, there are lots of things the breath can do for you. And if you can take an interest in it, it can help you. Then you’re not so interested in the other things the mind is feeding you or offering as food as you’re sitting here. When you’ve got good food like this, then you look at the other stuff you’ve been eating on, feeding on, and it’s not nearly as interesting. You might still go back to it, but at least for the time being you don’t have to. And when you get used to the feeding off of the breath, then you start thinking about those other kinds of things and feeding on them again. You can begin to wonder why. You realize now that you have the choice. In the past, it didn’t seem like you had a choice. Everything that came up into the mind just cobbled right down. But now that you’ve got better food, you can realize that you don’t have to take everything that comes in from outside. You don’t have to take everything the mind has created, because you do have the choice. And Chan-so-wa would talk about this often. We have the choice of the things that we’re going to feed on. There are all kinds of things we can think about and we can choose. And that’s a good lesson to learn right there. All too often we think that certain things come into the mind and you’ve got to feed on them. It’s as if we had no choice. Certain issues take on an importance way out of proportion to their real importance. They seem to dominate the mind. And if that’s all there is to feed on, well, that’s what you’re going to feed on. But you can create other food. That’s a good part of that intention as food. With sensory contact, you have some control, but not total. Certain things you can choose simply not to look at, not to listen to. But there are other things that, shining bright, in your face, blaring right in your ears. That’s the world outside. The world inside, though, you do have some power over that. This is what we’re learning as we meditate. And you want to make the best use of that power. You benefit. The people around you benefit as well. Because when the mind feeds itself in a way that makes itself sick, it’s going to start taking it out on other people. But if you’re feeding yourself well, what’s there to take out? You’ve got goodness inside, you can begin to radiate a little goodness out. So remember this principle. The mind is feeding, and some kinds of food you have no control over. But you can choose not to eat them. There are other things in the power that you can change about what you’re creating inside. And having this alternative source of food, a better source of food, allows you to be a more picky eater outside. Someone does something, someone says something, and things happen in the world. As long as you don’t take them as food, they’re not going to make you sick. It’s like a dead animal on the road. There are crows and things that will take it as food. But as long as you don’t see it as food, it doesn’t make you sick. Just see it as something that’s there on the road. Leave it there. It’s when you try to shoo the crows away and take some of their food away from them, that’s when you’re going to get sick. Or as John Lee says, “When other people say things that get you upset, tell yourself you’ve taken something they’ve spit out and you’ve eaten it.” When you get sick, who are you going to blame? Our problem is that we feed off of everything that comes our way. So learn the basic principle of the practice. Be selective in what you feed on. As for things that would make you sick, just leave them alone. When you feed the mind with the path, get the mind in right concentration, sit here and talk to yourself about the breath, talk to yourself about goodwill, whatever topic of meditation you’ve adopted. You’re strengthening the mind. Ultimately, as the Buddha says, you get to the point where the mind doesn’t have to feed at all. And that way you can live with anything. Thoughts come up in the mind, things happen in the world. And because it’s not trying to take them in, you can feed them with a lot more equanimity and not really be disturbed by them at all. But until you reach that point, you’ve got to provide yourself with good food. You can’t wait for the world to provide the good food. This means that you can’t feed on just anything the mind creates. This is why we train the mind so it can learn how to make good, nourishing, healthy food for itself. And as for the other potential types of food in the world, you just let them go. If somebody else wants to eat it, that’s their business. But you’ve taken care of your business inside. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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