Trust in the Process

January 27, 2022

One of the things you have to watch out for as you meditate is impatience. You read about all the great states that can be attained, and you look at your breath, you look at your mind, and say, “Okay, when are the states going to come?” Well, they’re not going to come by your asking. They’re going to come by your doing the work. So you focus right here. Focus on the breath. Let the text say, “Focus on the body, in and of itself ardent, alert, mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reverence to the world.” So you just do that again and again and again, so the mind gets used to being here. It has a tendency to want to check in on the present moment and then run off someplace else. Or you can make a comparison with proofreading. Have you ever read a proof? You realize that you have to look very carefully at each word. You slow down, take things one, one, one at a time. Because when you look at a sentence or look at a line of text, it’s all too easy to see things that are not there or assume that they’re there, or not to see some things that are there, because you want to make a quick synopsis or a quick summary of what’s there so you can move on someplace else. Whereas here we’re saying, “Each breath has to be important.” You can’t say, “Well, I’ve looked at one breath, and that’s going to tell me all I need to know about the rest of the breaths for the next five minutes.” No. This breath and then this breath and then this breath. And the mind will say, “Oh, I get to think about the fun things.” You don’t. You’ve got work to do. You have to look after the causes. And when the causes are right, things begin to happen. It’s kind of like making scrambled eggs the slow way. You put them over very low heat, and you stir and you stir and you stir, and for a long time nothing seems to be happening. You’re asking yourself, “How can I speed it up?” And you can’t speed it up. If you turn up the heat, you get rubber. You have to trust in the process as you stay here, stirring, stirring, stirring. Eventually things begin to coagulate, and you get nice, soft scrambled eggs. And it’s the same with the mind. Get the mind used to just being here and not giving in to the temptation to want to wander off or think about this or think about that. You tell yourself, “I can think about so many interesting things right now. Why can’t I do that?” No. Your interesting thoughts are not going to get you to nirvana. They’re not going to get you into concentration. It’s by being very meticulous not to wander off into those worlds. This is what the Buddha means by putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. The world of your thoughts. You just have to put them aside. Just the body in and of itself. The breath is an aspect of the body in and of itself. To be ardent means that you really want to stay here. You really want to do this well. Alert, you’re watching what you’re doing. Mindful, you remember what you want to do and you remember to stay here. And you remember what you’ve learned in the past about recognizing things that are and will come up here as you stay. A potential thought comes up. Is it related to the breath? If it is, okay, you think it. See if it helps. If it’s not related to the breath, you say, “Why? Why bother?” That’s one of those things that goes under putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. So you’re shifting your center of gravity here out of those thought worlds that would float around like balloons. You’re just staying grounded, grounded, grounded right here. And as for any thoughts that complain about being here, those are distress with reference to the world. You say, “Why can’t I think about that?” That’s distress with reference to the world. So you keep coming back, coming back. As you’re trying to develop new habits, as I said, to create a new center of gravity, rather than being centered in your ideas, you’re centered with the breath. You’re centered with the Dhamma. And you’re dealing with things that are actually happening. Your thoughts are things that you can doubt about. You can think about the past. Is your memory of the past really true? Well, who knows? What do you have to compare it with? As I say each time, you pull your memory out, look at it, and then put it back in, like a book in a library. We have a tendency to put the books back in different places or to scribble in the book a little bit as we pull it out. So over time, each time you pull the book out, it changes. And after a while, you’ve got a very different book. It’s the same with memories. Each time you pull them out and talk to yourself about them, you’ve added something new to them. So the next time you look at them, they’re going to have that extra commentary. As for thoughts of the future, those are totally up for grabs. Who knows what’s going to happen? The big earthquake could come at any time. So you ask yourself, “What’s certain about those things?” When you’re with the breath, you know the breath is coming in, you know the breath is coming out. As the Buddha said, you’re trying to develop a knowledge of the Dhamma that’s based on things that you really know. So you want to get to know, “Is the mind here with the breath? Is it not here with the breath?” That’s something you can really know. But then if it’s not with the breath, you don’t just leave it there and accept it as, “Well, this is the way things are right now.” You bring it back. You’re trying to change the way things are. You’re trying to make a difference. So the mind will wiggle and squirm. The Buddha compares it to a fish that’s been taken out of water. But you don’t follow it. You don’t give into it. Because, again, that’s greed and distress with reference to the world. Put that aside and stay right here. Then you begin to see, eventually, that there are potentials here. Just like the eggs that begin to coagulate, things do begin to change, though they’re not going to change in line with your preconceived notions. In Chan Fung, when he would talk about this, he said, “The mind has its own rhythms.” There’s a whole series of analogies in the Thai language about the rhythm of something. And you can’t force your rhythm on the rhythms of the mind. You put it under certain circumstances. In other words, you just stay right here, and you keep coming back and adjusting the breath, making it more comfortable. But you’ve got to respect the fact that the mind will have its own rhythms as it settles down. You take care of the causes, the mind will take care of the rest. A common image in the forest tradition is planting a rice field. The plants are going to grow. If you feed them enough fertilizer, give them water, you don’t have to pull on the plants to make them grow. In fact, if you pull on them, you probably kill them. Your duty is to make sure that the water is there, the fertilizer is there, all the pests that come and attack the rice plants are taken away, and the rice plant will grow. So trust in the process. When the Buddha set out the path, it’s not the case that he had an esoteric version and an exoteric version. The exoteric version would be what he told everybody. But then when you got to know the secret version, they didn’t teach you the shortcuts. That’s not the case. He taught what was necessary. He taught what needs to be done. As he said, there’s nothing excess and there’s nothing lacking in the Eightfold Path. It’s simply a question of really following the instructions. And it’s amazing how the Buddha set things out in such a way that people in different cultures and different times, following the instructions, would get the same results. So trust in your breath, trust in your ardency and your alertness and your mindfulness. Because when you put these things together, the concentration will grow. Whether it takes a long time or a short time, that’s not the issue. It’s simply a question of your maintaining the causes. And when the causes are right and you stick with them long enough, then the results will begin to come.

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