Working from Home

March 28, 2022

One of the Pali terms for your topic of meditation is vihara-dhamma. Vihara is home, dwelling, the quality that you dwell in. So, settle in. Make this house of your body a home. Try to be sensitive to the presence of the breath, the way you’re breathing right now. Feel the breath, all the way in, all the way out. Ask yourself, “Can you live with this? Could you dwell with this? Or would you like something better? What would better be? Longer? Shorter? Faster? Slower?” The in-breath and the out-breath don’t have to be equal. You can have a long in-breath and a shorter out-breath, or vice versa. When the breath is long coming in and short going out, it tends to be more energizing. It’s more relaxing when it’s short in and long out. Of course, relaxing could be sleep-inducing, so watch out for that. But play with the breath for a while. See which kind of breathing you can settle in with and stay with this all the way in, all the way out. And when it feels good, think of that good breath spreading. This is where we connect with the idea of breath as not only the in-and-out breath, but also the breath element of the breath. The breath property in the body. And they’re connected. So be sensitive to that connection. Allow the comfortable breath to spread down the spine, down the legs, down the shoulders, down the arms. Inhabit the body. Inhabit this comfortable sensation. This makes it a rehab. And then learn how to maintain it. The maintaining is a little bit less active than the cleaning out. You might think of yourself cleaning out this house. Then once it’s clean, you dust it now and then. Don’t just leave it clean. The question sometimes comes up, “When everything is cleaned out like this, what’s next?” I had a question the other day. Someone said that once it became easier to clean out the tensions in the body like this, she found that she was less and less inclined to want to stay and meditate for long periods of time. Come in and do a quick dusting, and that was enough. We have to remember that this house we’re living in is the house that you’re going to be working from. You’re working from home. And we just come in, clean things up, and go away. It’s like cleaning out your office and then going away, as if cleaning out the office was enough. There’s work to be done in the office, and it’s subtler work. Maintaining that sense of full body awareness and then noticing whatever thoughts are going to come in. One of the first ones, of course, is, “Well, what’s next?” Or, “This is enough.” You have to remind yourself, “No, it’s not enough.” The word “enough” doesn’t come into meditation until total awakening. So what’s still lacking? What you’re lacking now is understanding. You’ve got this nice, comfortable place to stay, and then all of a sudden you find yourself off someplace else. How did that happen? What were the steps? Because the steps by which you create a distraction like that are the steps that give rise to becoming. And as the Buddha said, you don’t want to wait until becoming becomes full-blown before you try to either get rid of it or create one, create a new one. You want to see the steps leading up to it. This is why he gave his analysis of dependent co-arising. So you can look at the steps and say, “Well, these are the steps by which I create a whole world of thought.” I leave my home office and I go off into this little pod of a thought world. It’s like a bubble. And then it hits something and it breaks, and you come crashing down. And sometimes you just try to catch a ride with the next passing bubble. Here you want to change your trajectory. You want to come back to the body in the present moment and watch for the steps. How does the mind fool itself? How does the mind lie to itself about what it’s doing? You tell yourself, “I’m here with the breath. Everything is fine.” But there are other voices in the mind that say, “Well, everything is fine in here. That’s good enough. We’ve got other things we’ve got to do, other things we’ve got to think about.” You can go out on the list of your various cravings and clingings. Time for a little sensual fantasy, maybe. Time to start thinking about your worldviews, what’s going on in the world right now. There are a lot of opinions on that. Some opinions are so strong that people can’t get along anymore. And then there are your ideas about yourself, the kind of person you are. And if anything challenges the idea of what kind of person you think you are, you’ve got to do battle with that. And you have to ask yourself, “If I continue with these things, these are going to lead to more become-ings. I’m going to see how I came up with these issues to begin with.” So you have to learn how to wait. This is where it’s useful to have patience. Have a home base inside the body, like a spider on the web. The spider sits in one spot, but it’s sensitive to the entire web. And if anything comes up and gets caught in the web, it zips right over, kills it, and then moves back. So here in the same way, you want to see where in your awareness does the thought first arise. Because it’s not just a mental activity. There’s also a physical component. And when it’s physical, it has to have a location. The location will be someplace in the range of your awareness in the body. Sometimes it’s related to the breath. There’ll be a little knot, tension reappearing in the breath. If you sense that, okay, zap it. Comb it out. Clear it out. Then go back to your base. Another analogy would be as if you’re a hunter. The hunter has to be very still but very alert at the same time. You can’t zone out. If a hunter goes and sits in the forest and zones out, he’s not going to get anything. If he moves around a lot, he’s going to scare the animals away. So you have to have this balance of stillness and alertness. That’s the balancing act. And that’s the work you do in the office. That’s home for the mind. And work can take you through many levels. You solve one problem, another problem comes. Don’t get discouraged. There is a limit to the mind’s problems. After a while, you begin to see patterns. And you learn how to see certain ways of thinking that underlie a lot of different issues that come up in the mind. Although “underlie” may not be a good word. It’s more of issues that come very closely together with whatever’s coming up in the mind. A lot of things in the mind get glommed together. You might think of it as our refresh rate. It tends to be pretty slow. And as you’re meditating, you want to get your refresh rate faster so you can detect subtle, quick things that are going on. It’s like birdsong. We’ve got thrushes now coming. And you notice their call tends to end with what sounds like this blast of several notes all at once. Actually, they’re singing arpeggios, but very fast. They’re faster than human ears can pick up, because the human refresh rate is slower than theirs. So what’s happening is all happening right in front of our eyes in the mind. It’s simply that we’re not quick enough to see distinctions, quick enough to see steps. But as you get the mind really still and really sensitive, your refresh rate does change. You get faster. So this is your home office. Sometimes there’s so much work involved in cleaning the home office that you don’t get around to doing the actual work in the office. Other times, after a while, when it gets so you’re better and better at cleaning the office, you say, “Okay, that’s enough. Done.” Remember, you’re cleaning the office so you can work in it. And it’s good work, understanding the way the mind fools itself, because that’s why we suffer. We’re suffering coming from ignorance. This is the kind of ignorance he’s talking about. It’s not like we’re ignorant of some theory out there. We’re ignorant of our own minds, the way they work. If we learn how to see through the way they work, then we can stop producing suffering. So get to work. Once the office needs cleaning, clean it up. Once it’s clean, settle in and do the real work inside, watching the patterns and processes in the mind.

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