Your Own World to Explore

November 6, 2022

When the Buddha was a young prince, he looked around the world and saw that every place he could see had already been laid claim to. Somebody owned something or claimed to own something. And if he was going to find happiness in the world outside, he would have to fight them off. He would have to lay claim. And the whole idea made him despair. But then he looked inside, and he realized that the problem wasn’t with the world outside, the problem was inside. There was an arrow, he said, in the heart. The arrow of the suffering that we create for ourselves. And he realized that if he could remove that arrow, there would be no suffering. There would be no conflict. No need for conflict. You could find happiness inside. So this is why we meditate. There is the area of the world outside that we have to engage in, that we have to deal with other people. And it’s always going to be a give and take. But we have our own inner world here. The body as we feel it from within. The mind as we sense it from within. And nobody else can know that. They may stick electrodes on your head and see that you have certain brain waves. But what you’re thinking, they can’t see. What you have as images in the mind, they can’t see. The same with the body. They can measure all kinds of things in the body from outside. But how you feel your breath from within, that’s something they can’t measure. So here’s your world. Here’s your opportunity. This is your space. You can cultivate this as much as you’d like. You can lay claim to it as much as you’d like, or do whatever you want. But the Buddha says the wisest thing is to learn how to analyze what’s going on, to see where you’re creating unnecessary suffering. The body and the mind together he calls name and form. Name is basically the activities of the mind. Form is the body as you sense it from within. The breath is the prime property or the prime potential here. And then the other ones are more secondary. There’s warmth, the fire element. Coolness, the water element. Solidity, the earth element. Space. And then there’s consciousness. You can learn how to manipulate these things because they’re properties. They’re not just a given. They’re potentials. Like with the breath. They’re all kinds of ways that you can breathe right now. So look at the way you’re breathing. Is it comfortable? Can you think of ways of breathing that would be more comfortable? Why not try them out? If you’re feeling tired, think of breathing in a way that might be more energizing. If you’re feeling tense, breathe in a way that’s more relaxing. If you’re feeling frazzled from the world, breathe in a way that’s more relaxing. If you’re feeling sick, breathe in a way that soothes the body, soothes the mind. There are lots of potentials here. And they’re yours to play with. So take this time. We’re in a sheltered place here, cut off from the rest of the world. Physically, but mentally we still have a lot of connections outside. So try to cut those connections whenever you see your mind. Try reaching out to thoughts of what’s happened in the past, what’s going to happen in the future. Just cut, cut, cut those lines of thought. Each time you drop a thought, you’ll be right back at the breath. So try to stay here as much as you can and get as much sense of curiosity as you can develop about what the possibilities are here. What are the potentials you have here? Each of those elements exists in potential form in every spot in the body. So right now, where would it feel good for the breath to begin? Use your imagination. Or if you want to think of every spot in the body being equally a center of breathing, try that. You’re working both with the body as you feel it from within and the aggregate of what the Buddha calls perception. Another part of name. These are the labels you put on things, the images you have in mind. And you’re perfectly free to label things as you like. Of course, some labels may not be helpful, not particularly relevant to what’s going on right now. So try to label things in a way that would be relevant, but also develop potentials in a direction where you want them to go. Try to think of all the breath energies in the body being coordinated. So as you breathe in, the whole body’s breathing in together. You don’t have one part of the body breathing in, another part of the body frozen. Or you don’t have one part of the body breathing down, another part of the body breathing up. And John Fung would say, think of there being like a pole down the middle of the body. And all the breath energies come into that pole as you breathe in, and they all go out from there. So think of that pole as you breathe out. Or you can think of the breath in the bones. There’s a lot to explore here. And the more you get interested in this world inside, the less the world outside is going to impinge on you. The less confined you will feel about the world outside. So you place your hopes on the world outside being a certain way. You’re reluctant. You’re very resistant. It’s not the case that we can’t have an influence on the world outside. We can. But if you pin your hopes for happiness outside, you’ve got them pinned in the wrong place. Because things can change radically. And in some cases you can do something about it, and in a lot of cases you can’t. So you do what you can. But if you put your hopes on the world outside, you can do something about it, and in a lot of cases you can’t. So you place your hopes on the world outside being a certain way. And in a lot of cases you can’t. So you place your hopes on the world outside being a certain way. And in a lot of cases you can’t. So you place your hopes on the world outside being a certain way. And in a lot of cases you can’t. 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What would be a better way of focusing on the breath? What would be a better way of breathing in, breathing out? Because there’s lots of ins and outs to the breath. And there’s a lot you can play with. Have that attitude of play. Because this is your territory. And if you can’t enjoy your own territory, where are you going to find enjoyment? So pay attention inside here. Realize that this is where you’re going to look for your happiness. And you don’t have to fight anybody else off. There’s nobody else coming in. Nobody else can come in and see your breath for you. Or push you out of the way. And although there are times when the world outside, as you try to push things in a particular direction, other people will push back. Here what you have pushing back is simply the reality of what is possible in the mind and what’s not possible in the mind. What’s possible in the body, what’s not possible in the body. And how are you going to find that out? Well, try. And John Lee points out that we hear so much about things being inconstant, stressful, and not self. But he says, okay, push it. Try to make your concentration constant. Where there’s dis-ease in the body, can you change it to a sense of ease, well-being? Where the mind has not been under control, can you bring it under control? See how far you can push in these directions. There will be a limit. But if you don’t push against these things, you don’t know where that limit is. And you can’t take advantage of the territory. Where you can make things constant and easeful and under your control. After all, that’s the path. It’s a path where we do things. We put it together. It’s not just letting things follow their own way. Because things following their own way, they can actually go many different ways. We’re trying to push them in the direction of something that’s really solid and reliable. A real happiness that we can discover inside, that nobody else can push us away from. That’s really worth looking into. Because in trying to find happiness in the world outside, you’ve got to fight other people. But with this, you’re just fighting your own defilements. When you kill the defilement, there’s no precept against that. You lay claim to the breath. There’s no precept against that. You find enjoyment in the breath. There’s no precept against that. You do have to tell yourself the truth, though. And you want to make sure you don’t get intoxicated with thoughts that would pull you away. But here’s an area where the first three precepts don’t really have any sway. So this is the area where freedom is found. In the world outside, we can push for freedom in some directions. And sometimes we can get what we want. And other times we can’t. But in looking for a real satisfaction, the only area that you can find that is here inside. But it’s not a lesser satisfaction. It’s actually greater. Even those who can run the world. And they’ve figured out ways of getting what they want out of the world. They find that the world, even when you get what you want, that the world can offer, it’s not all that satisfactory. In the canon, they like to show how even kings, who back in those days were the absolute authorities in their countries, still couldn’t get what they wanted. There were many things they couldn’t get. That’s because they were looking for the wrong things. They were looking in the wrong place. It’s when you look inside that you can actually find satisfaction. So here we have the time, we have the opportunity. Really get to know this area inside. Get so that you’re familiar with it. Get so that this is the natural place for you to settle in. That you know the territory. And feel at home here. And that way you can develop and find what potentials there are here and develop them as far as you can. As the Buddha said, you can take them really far. So here’s your chance to see if he’s right.

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