

De-personalizing the World

August 15, 2016

Focus on your breath.

As for whatever else there is in your awareness, just let it go, let it go.

There are a lot of things we have to endure in this world. The two main ones that the Buddha focuses on are harsh words and unpleasant physical sensations.

His recommendation for dealing with harsh words is to not personalize them. In other words, de-personalize them. A sound makes contact at the ear and already we've got a story ready for it. The story is what actually causes us a lot of trouble. The voice that says, "I can't stand this, I can't stand this": That's actually what you can't stand.

So you have to learn how to de-personalize the sound. Even if someone is particularly saying something they mean to be nasty to you, don't let your mind personalize it. Let that just be their karma. Remember that's their karma, not yours. You just watch it go past, go past, go past.

The same thing with physical sensations: We're going to have a heatwave this week. It's going to be hotter than normal. If you personalize the heat, it's going to become oppressive. You have to find a cool place to stay, relatively cool. And then as the heat builds up in the air around the body, remember it's there in the air around the body, some of it will seep into the body itself. This is why you drink a lot of water, make sure you get a lot of salt and other things so that you don't get dehydrated.

Then look at that voice that says, "Why is this heatwave happening to me?" Remember the times last winter when you wanted warmth. Well, now you've got the warmth. And there are heatwaves going on in the world that are a lot worse than this right now. So it's not as if somebody is out there trying to make you suffer.

Or even if they are trying to make you suffer, you don't play along with them. You play along with them when you start personalizing things and make it unbearable.

So find what you can bear inside. Make sure the breath is comfortable. There are parts in the body that are cooler than other parts: Focus on those. Empathize the coolness inside.

Approach this as a problem that's not personal. That way it's a lot easier to figure out a solution. Once you personalize things, you're going to suffer. You personalize the pain.

You don't have to personalize it. You don't have to say, "This is me. This is mine." It's just there. It's unpleasant but it can just be there and not get spun out into elaborate narratives that you then use to stab yourself.

So remember, it's the mind's chatter: That's a lot of the suffering right there. Learn how to keep the chatter to a minimum. And keep it on-topic. You're going to stay with the breath. You're not going to get involved in stories about the heat or stories about the other people around you. You don't have to play along with the world in making you suffer.

The world, of course, doesn't intend to make you suffer with its heat. That's just the way the world is. If there were no heat in the world, we'd all die. And the way the weather system acts, there's going to be heat here, but it's going to be good someplace else. There are times when it's really good here and other people are suffering someplace else from the heat or the cold, too much rain, too little rain, whatever.

So just see this as something that's passing: It's going to do its heat thing and then it's going to cool down. But you don't have to make it personal. That way you find it a lot easier to bear.