

Minding Your Own Business

November 26, 2003

When you meditate, you're learning to mind your own business, to focus on where your real responsibilities really lie.

Normally, we're like people whose own houses are in a mess but, instead of cleaning up their own houses, they go out and they tell other people to clean up theirs. They're afraid of a rat infestation or a bug infestation, so they try to get everybody else to clean up their houses and they forget the fact that in their own house they've got a lot of garbage. There could be rats and bugs coming out of their own house.

So as we meditate, we're learning to come and clean up our own houses, to make sure that we at least are not a source of rats and bugs.

What's your own house? Well, there's the world of your senses. Even though we're all sitting here in the same sala, we each live in our own worlds. Your world of sensory experience is not the same as the sensory experience of the person sitting next to you.

In particular, your sensation of your own body from the inside: There was a Peanuts cartoon one time when Linus was talking to Lucy and he said, "Here, feel my hands." Lucy says, "Yeah, they're cold." Linus replies, "I know, they feel very cold." And she says, "How do you know how they feel when you're inside them?"

Even though you may touch someone else's hand, your experience of that person's hand is not the same as that person's experience of his or her own hand. When it's your hand, you're inside it. Your experience of the inside of the hand: That's yours. It's nobody else's.

The other thing that's exclusively yours is your intentions. When you decide to do something or say something or think something, that's your choice. Nobody else gets involved. Other people may try to influence it, and often you get very easily swayed by other people, but it's still your choice to get swayed.

These two things—your intentions and your immediate sensation of your sensory world—are yours and they're your business. This is what you've got to clean up, because all the mess in your world comes from these places.

So, as we sit and meditate, we're learning to get down to the very basics of what's *our* part of the body, what's *our* part of the mind. When you're sitting here in the body, what are you experiencing? You're actually experiencing the breath energy. If it weren't for the breath energy, you wouldn't sense the body at all. Without the breath, this would just be a lifeless piece of flesh. There'd be no

sensation at all. With the breath, there is sensation.

Not only that, but the way you breathe has a big impact on how you sense the body. If you breathe in ways that are unhealthy or constricting, that creates a bad foundation right there. And if you don't feel comfortable in your own body, where are you going to feel comfortable?

As for your intentions: If you can't get them to stay with the breath, how can you have any hope to control them? Just this simple thing: It's right here, it doesn't require a lot of extraordinary intelligence in order to be able to stay with the breath, to sense the breath. It's simply a matter of learning how to maintain an intention.

So you put all these things together: your internal sense of the body, which is filtered through the breath, and your intention to stay here. If you can do that, then there's hope for the rest of your experience of the world. Because these are the basics.

So what have you got here in terms of the breath? Where does it feel that the energy of the body is moving? Where does it feel like it's standing still? Where does it feel comfortable and open? Where does it feel constricted and tight?

You can make a survey of the body, going through the different sections. You can start at the back of the neck or at the navel. It's good to start in an area where you can clearly sense the breath, and then move to other areas where the sensation of the breath is more subtle.

The more you get tuned in to this level of your awareness, and the static in your radio begins to go away, then the more you can see. You begin to see that even the simple process of breathing can get all screwed up if you don't pay it any attention.

What you're here trying to do is to sort out which ways of breathing feel good for the whole body. You take it section-by-section first: Breathe in a way that feels good for this section, then move on to the next section and watch that for a while. Try to sense what kind rhythm feels good for that section. Keep moving through each section of the body in this way.

You're opening up the connections in the breath channels in the various parts of the body. Then when you come through the second time, you find things more coordinated. The different parts of the body that at first seem to need different rhythms of breathing now begin to tune in to one level of breathing that feels good for everybody because they're all working together.

Learn to maintain that sense of well-being. It's something we so quickly throw away. We get a nice little piece of peace and quiet here, and we say, "Okay, what's next?" Then it's as if the mind hadn't been quiet at all. What you've got to learn to

do is maintain this sense of the breath in the body as your frame of awareness. As for everything else, think of it as just passing through that frame of awareness. But the frame stays here, stays settled in here, in this area that's your own personal business: your internal sense of the body, the mind's discussion with itself as to what to focus on, what to do next.

You want to keep things on this level, because this is the basic level that shapes all the pain and suffering or the ease and happiness of our lives. All too often, we focus on the pain and the suffering out there and we don't stay in touch with the source from which they come: how the body feels in the present moment, what the mind is thinking of doing in the present moment. So as we meditate, we're giving ourselves the chance to back up to these causal factors and stay right here without losing touch with them.

This is called minding your own business, cleaning up your own house. If each person in this world would mind his or her own business, clean up his or her own house, there wouldn't be any trouble or conflicts in the world.

Our problem is that we leave our own immediate responsibilities and start worrying about other people: what they're doing, what messes they're creating for us, or what messes they're creating for other people.

That can be appropriate only after we've really taken care of our own business. Otherwise, we leave huge blind spots in our mind about what we're doing and saying and thinking. We become oblivious to our impact on the world where we really are responsible.

We were talking this afternoon about ethics, of how our actions have an impact on other people and how that might in turn have an impact on still other people and ripple out that way. When you try to track down the ripples you go crazy.

The Buddha once said pretty much the same thing. If you try to track down the results of action, the results of karma in all their ramifications, you would go crazy because it's so complex. But, he said, there's a way of cutting through that complexity so that you actually can make choices.

And that's to focus on your own intentions. Make sure that your intentions are skillful. You can check them by looking at what you do and then looking at the results that come about. At the very least, make sure there's as little greed, anger, and delusion as possible in your intentions. The impact of your actions will have to be a good impact.

Whether you've worked out all the channels through which that impact is going to go—and of course you can't work through all those channels, you can't anticipate them all—but as long as the quality of your intention is good and

you've made sure to keep the amount of delusion in your intention down to the absolute minimum, you find that your actions do have a good impact on yourself and on the people around you.

So this, too, is an issue of cleaning up your own house, minding your own business and taking full responsibility for the areas where you do have a full responsibility.

Keeping things basic like this cuts through a lot of the garbage that our minds can create, all the subterfuges and rationalizations and excuses we make for ourselves. As long as you keep things basic, simple, what's right here right now, then it's hard to fool yourself. And as you're not fooling yourself, you find that all the suffering that comes from ignorance gets less and less and less in your life.

So this is the area where you want to develop as much awareness as possible: an all-around awareness of the body, an all-around awareness of the breath, leading to an all-around awareness of the mind.

That's possible only as you stay here with the basics. If you go tracing things out to their far end, you get caught in the branches. If you stay right here, you're with the trunk of the tree, the heartwood of the tree. That's where things remain solid.

So. A salad of mixed metaphors tonight. Take whichever metaphor you find most useful.