

The Creator of Worlds

July 11, 2009

The mind is constantly creating worlds for itself to live in. Sometimes they're based on things you're experiencing right now. But there's always an element that comes in from the past—your assumptions, your narratives, your sense of who you are—so that even pleasant experiences in the present moment can be turned into pain as they stir up issues from the past, or as you bring issues from the past to bear on the present.

Conversely, you can be in a lot of pain in the present moment but not suffer at all, again, depending on what you've brought from the past, how you're constructing your world right now.

So as we're on the path to practice, we're creating a different world. Ultimately, we go beyond this need to create worlds for ourselves. But there's only one kind of world that's going to allow you to do that: That's the world in which the mind is in a good solid state of concentration.

So you have to firmly believe that you need this world and you're not going to let any of your other worlds come in and interfere with it. Especially when this world is not all that solid, you've got to have a strong sense of boundaries, that anything that's not helpful in the construction of a world of peace and well-being in the mind won't be welcome in.

You want to get to the point where this is your home. In Pali they talk about having a *vihara* or a dwelling place for the mind. That means you're able to take a particular theme or a particular topic for concentration and stay with it long enough that you're really dwelling there. You're not hopping around from one timeshare place to another timeshare place. You've got a home.

Then when the home is really solidly built and very comfortable, you can start inviting some of your old unpleasant friends back in so that you get to really know them in a safer environment. At the same time, you can begin to take apart some of those other worlds you've been living in.

But ideally, you have to wait until the concentration is strong enough to handle these things. There are some times when outside issues are really pressing and you have to make do with whatever concentration you've got to deal with them, because the issues demand resolution right away. But there are a lot of other issues that you've been living with for years and years and years, and it's not that you have to solve them tonight, or this week, or this month. You've got to build up your strength in the meantime.

The reason we go for those other worlds is because there's some pleasure in them. There's something we delight in in the different worlds. But the problem is that each of those worlds has its drawbacks. Sometimes we're conscious of the drawbacks and we deny to ourselves that

there's a pleasure there. Then other times we're more conscious of the pleasure and try to deny the drawbacks.

What we need is a world where we can look at things in all fairness, to see both the drawbacks and the delight that we have in our different worlds. Then we can weigh them, give them their proper weight.

In some cases, it hurts to see where we've been taking our pleasure—which is why this home of concentration has to be really solid, really strong. The sense of well-being that comes from it has to be really, really pervasive.

As the Buddha once said, you can see the drawbacks of your old attachments and understand them, but if you don't have an alternative source of pleasure—i.e., the pleasure that comes from a well-concentrated mind—you're not going to be able to give up all those other old pleasures.

So you've got to have trust in this concentration. Even though it seems like you're shutting off the windows, shutting off the doors, pretending that things are not there, that's not the case. You're preparing yourself. You're preparing the mind so that it can actually handle these issues with strength, confidence, and fairness.

The pleasure that comes from concentration allows you to see these other pleasures for what they really are. And some of them are pretty miserable pleasures. Others are not so miserable, but they're pretty weak compared to the sense of well-being that can come when the mind settles down.

In the beginning, it's going to be a fight because you've been living in these other worlds for a long time and you feel comfortable in them. They're like an old shoe: It may not necessarily be good for your foot but it's the shoe you're used to. These other, new shoes don't feel quite right yet.

But you have to keep reminding yourself: This is how you prepare the mind so that it can really deal with its issues.

After all, when the Buddha gained awakening, he gained it from this position: the position of a well-concentrated mind. It was here that his equanimity and mindfulness became pure.

You're feeding the mind on skillful pleasures. You're going to be holding on to this, but it's a skillful thing to hold on to. You've got a sense of well-being that nourishes the mind, so that you don't have to go feeding in hidden corners, feeding off of other people's scraps.

So this is food for the mind, shelter for the mind, medicine for the mind. It provides the mind with all of its requisites.

You can think of it as creating an honest judge in your mind. If you have a judge who's hungry, he's going to try to please the people he can feed off of. He's going to be preying on this group he can feed off of, and being unfair to another group because he doesn't feel he can get anything out of them. But if the judge is well-fed, then he doesn't have to feed on any of the people he's passing judgment on. He's more likely to be fair in his judgments.

So you try to put the mind in a good place. It may involve some struggle, but it's not always going to be struggle. And even though it involves some attachment —because you will be attached to this state of concentration—it's a much better attachment than places where you're already attached.

It's very ironic that you hear so much about the dangers of being attached to concentration. The Buddha himself mentioned only one danger, which is that once you've got here you may not be inclined to want to move on to awakening. But that particular attachment is something very easy to deal with once you recognize it for what it is.

You can compare that with the dangers of being attached to sensual pleasures, which are much stronger and much more dangerous. Even in the so-called jhana wars, you don't hear of anybody actually killing or stealing or having illicit sex or lying or taking intoxicants because of their attachment to jhana. It's the people who are attached to sensuality: Those are the ones who kill and steal and have illicit sex and lie and take intoxicants, creating all sorts of havoc in the world.

It's from the position of concentration that eventually you can learn to totally let go. Sensual attachments are like potato chips: you've had one then you have to have another then another, but they don't really nourish you. They just fill you up but they're not really good for you.

So it's important that you have confidence in the practice of concentration. It puts the mind in a world where it can actually judge its other worlds fairly, see where there's the delight in that particular world, that particular narrative, that particular way of looking at things. And also see the drawbacks of those particular worlds.

As a result, you find that your craving and clinging for those worlds begins to clear away, clear away, clear away. When there's no craving or clinging for them, you're not creating them anymore. They seem real now simply because they're so habitual. xx

The world of concentration seems to be artificial because we're not yet skilled at creating it. But as you get more and more accustomed to it, you find that it's a much preferable world. And you see things a lot more clearly.

After all, you're creating a sense of awareness that fills the body, a sense of well-being that can saturate the body. When the mind has been fed and sheltered like this, then it's in a position where it can see things clearly, can handle all of its old attachments, because it's got something better to hold on to.

So as you're creating this world, if anything comes up, no matter how insistent it is, just remind yourself that that's another world and you're not sure you want to keep on living in worlds of that sort. And remember that those other worlds are creations. You're creating them right now.

A memory from the past, no matter how real it was in the past, now it's a creation. You can choose to include that in your narrative or not. For the time being, just say, "No narratives

dealing with that. Only the narratives dealing with the breath right now.” If the mind does get involved with narratives of the past, tweak the narratives so that they incline you to come back here. Remind yourself of how much you’ve been suffering by staying in those narratives, carrying those memories around. Remind yourself of your desire to put those burdens down.

Well, this is the place where you can do it. That way, the narrative delivers you back here to the present moment, delivers you back to the breath. Once you’re here, you can drop the narrative. Stay right here. Get acquainted right here. Make this your home.

For all too long, the present moment has been a bus station: Anybody can come in; anybody can go out. And you keep traveling around in these buses of these different worlds: what they call *bhava* or becoming. When they deliver you back to the bus station, you hop on the next bus. Sometimes they don’t even deliver you back here. You just go from one bus to the next to the next and you end up in Nevada, Nebraska, the Northwest Territories.

So come back to the bus station and clean it out, make it a home. Close the windows, close the doors for the time being. Anyone who comes knocking say, “This isn’t a bus station anymore. This is my home. I’m going to stay here.”

Ajaan Chah’s image is of a house that has only one chair, and you’re sitting in the chair. No matter who comes into the house, they’re your guests. You’re not obliged to show them any hospitality, because you’re sitting in the chair. Nobody else gets to sit in the chair, because the person in the chair is in charge.

You want to make this your home. You want to belong here, because the strength that comes from being right here, the sense of well-being that comes from being right here, is what will eventually allow you to take those worlds apart and to see them for what they are: They were just creations causing suffering, but you kept on creating them anyhow.

And you realize you don’t need to do that anymore because you find you have everything you need right here.