

Constructing & Deconstructing

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When the Buddha taught tranquility and insight, he didn't teach them as two separate techniques. They're two qualities of mind that you try to develop as you're getting the mind into concentration. Like right now, you're trying to stay with the breath, to settle in, to have a sense of ease with the breath. That's tranquility. But as the Buddha said when he gave breath meditation instructions, you're trying to look at the breath as bodily fabrication, and your feelings and perceptions around the breath as mental fabrication. When you see things in terms of fabrication, that's insight.

For the time being, we're not watching them just arising and passing away. We're trying to give rise to good fabrications and hasten the passing away of ones that are not skillful. When the Buddha talks about discernment being penetrative insight into arising and passing away, it's not just passively watching things come and go. He says that this insight is penetrative, and when he talks about penetrative, it means seeing distinctions, and especially the distinction of what's skillful, what's not skillful: What has an effect on what. In other words, what's a cause, what's an effect, and what are good causes, and what are bad causes? As he goes on to say, this is the insight that leads to the right ending of stress and suffering.

That requires that you know what to do with things as they arise and pass away. Some things, when they arise, you want to abandon because they're unskillful. Other things, when they arise, are good, they're skillful, so you want to encourage them, develop them. If they're not there yet, you try to give rise to them. So it's not as if you're stepping back and just watching these things happening on their own. You try to play a role in figuring out which ones you want to encourage and which ones you don't.

Right now, you want to encourage the arising of whatever will give rise to a good state of concentration and maintain your concentration, and you want to discourage whatever is going to destroy it. All this is the work of insight. On the one hand, you're constructing a state of concentration out of the processes of fabrication. As for things that would come in and destroy your concentration, you want to deconstruct them. That's what the word *visankhara*. means in Pali. Sometimes that's translated as the unfabricated, but it's not. In that passage where the Buddha talks about seeing the house builder, he says he was engaged in

deconstruction, dismantling the ridge pole. *Visankhara*. That's how you come to the end of craving.

So you get the mind still. Make it tranquil and then see what's going to come in to destroy that tranquility. Sometimes the things that might destroy it come from outside, as when pain comes in and invades, and you have to deal with it. Here you're trying to deconstruct: What is it about the pain that invades the mind? We're not here to make the pain go away. We're here to understand: Why does it invade the mind and remain? You find a state of becoming that gets developed around the pain—you as the victim of the pain—and you learn how to take that apart. Where there's the pain, which part of the experience is the body? Which part is the actual pain, and which part is the perception?

If you look at this in terms of the establishings of mindfulness, you've got body, feeling, mind, and then mental qualities, in which case the mental qualities here might be the categories of the five aggregates. How are you using the five aggregates to put together your experience of pain? You start off by focusing on the pain itself, but then you begin to realize the pain is not so much the problem. The problem is the perceptions and thought constructs that go around it: how you talk to yourself about the pain, the images you have in mind about the pain, how it's invaded your space, and how you're being oppressed by it. Then the mind starts sending messages back and forth into the past and the future. Into the past, it starts talking about how long the pain has been there and how much you can't stand it. Into the future, it sends us warnings: "Watch out, there's a pain here." That perception shapes your next moment of consciousness, and your next moment, and then your next moment. It drags them down, fastens them to the pain.

You want to watch out for that. Learn how to take that process apart, because it's the perception that makes the pain invade the mind.

This is an instance of using your powers of insight to take things apart that would otherwise destroy your concentration. At that moment, actually, the pain itself becomes the topic of your concentration, and you're working on the insight together. If the work of insight starts getting blurry, if you can't deconstruct things properly, you can go back to the breath. Protect it. Say, "This is my area." Hold that perception in mind. Let the pain have something else. If it's too much to bear, if it's destroying your concentration, then move. But otherwise, see if you can stay here with the pain, because again, the purpose is not so much to make the pain go away. It's to see: Why does it invade the mind?

Other times, when there's not much pain, everything seems to settle down fine. Then you can ask yourself, after the mind is rested, what in here is still

disturbing the concentration? Here you're not so much looking for disturbances from outside. You're looking for disturbances the mind is creating itself. And the classic example is that when you're getting the mind to settle down, you've got to talk to it. You evaluate the breath, think about the breath, evaluate the breath some more. You think about your mind, evaluate your mind, see how you might be able to fit them together. When the fit is snug, you don't have to do so much talking anymore.

But our minds are chatterboxes. Once you start talking, you can't stop. We get carried away listening to the sound of our inner voice. You've got to remind yourself, you don't need that here. It's actually a disturbance. There's a sense of self that's associated with that inner voice, and it's going to get upset. "Why don't you want me?" And the answer is, "We don't need you right now." Just try to be with the breath. Zero in and try to be one with the breath.

So here you're constructing or putting things together. And you find yourself going back and forth: protecting the mind, getting it more settled in, and then trying to understand whatever the disturbances are. Take those apart and then put together again what you've got left.

So you're going back and forth like this. Ajaan Lee's image is of a person walking. You alternate your left foot and your right foot, and your left foot and your right foot. You don't go hopping down the road on just one foot and say, "When do I get to insight so I can change my foot?" Your feet go back and forth like this.

As you get better and better deconstructing the disturbances and shifting your focus from the disturbances outside to the disturbances inside, that's where you see that insight does a lot of its real work: taking apart the mind that's doing the concentration. That, too, has its form and feelings and perceptions and thought constructs and consciousness. The fact is that the mind in concentration is the ideal laboratory for understanding these things and dismantling them.

With the voices in the mind, you find there are many layers. There's the voice that tries to take charge, and then the other voices make comments on it. Then there are the voices that make comments on the comments. See what you can do to take them apart. Because as the Buddha said in another passage, in addition to seeing things arising and passing away, you want to see things as separate. Those are two sides of the same coin. Once you've got the mind in either a state of concentration or any emotion, it's in a state of becoming. And as the Buddha said, once you're in a state of becoming, if you try to destroy it, that's craving for non-becoming. If you try to maintain it, it's craving for becoming.

What do you do? You try to see how the next becoming is getting put together. That's where the work of dismantling or deconstruction comes in—the work of seeing things as separate as they arise and pass away.

So develop a sense of dispassion for the raw materials from which that state of becoming gets formed. That way, whether it's a becoming that's a distraction, or the becoming of concentration itself, you understand the inner workings, the things that come prior to becoming. As the Buddha said, you see what has come to be simply as what has come to be, and then you allow it to pass away.

That's how you get beyond the concentration. But in the meantime, you've got to work on it and protect it. Your construction and deconstruction will deal mainly with keeping the concentration constructed and deconstructing any disturbances wherever you find them. Sometimes the map of the jhanas will give you some good ideas about where you might want to look for the disturbance. Is the disturbance directed thought and evaluation? Is the mind oppressed by the sense of rapture? Where's the disturbance? See what's causing it.

The purpose being that you get subtler in your ability to take things apart. You see that when they arise, there are different events arising that you've glommed together. Again, as with the pain: There are little moments of pain, waiting to glom together into one big block of pain, located right there at that spot in your body. It's invaded that spot in the body. In telling yourself this story about the pain, you've already made it into a kind of becoming. So you've got to take it apart. What exactly are the pain sensations? What are the perceptions that you apply to the pain sensations? Do they rise and fall away at the same time, or are they separate events? When they arise, are they coming at you? Are they going away? Try to do what you can to make sure they don't come in and invade.

Keep this up as long as you have the energy to deal with it. See things as distinct. When things start getting blurry, and it's hard to make distinctions, then you go back to your concentration. Rest for a while. In this way, you keep walking—left, right, left, right—and these two activities of constructing and deconstructing help each other along.

So remember, it's not just a matter of still, still, still, still, still, and then insight, insight, insight, arising, passing away, arising, passing away. The mind is a lot more complex than that. If you make your concentration practice a complete practice with insight and tranquility helping the concentration along—protecting it when you need to protect it, reconstructing it when it starts falling apart—your insight into arising and passing does get penetrative. You begin to see what works, what doesn't work, what's helpful, what's not.

When you start making distinctions like that, that's when you can apply the teachings of the four noble truths. Because the different events in the mind do have their different duties, and the four noble truths are there to remind you what the duties are. With the aggregates, your duty is to comprehend them. That means understanding how you cling to them until you arrive at the point where there's no passion, aversion or delusion around them.

Your duty with regard to the craving that would lead you to be passionate about these things is to abandon it. As for anything that's good, that's helpful in the path, that's something you try to develop so that the path will take you to where you want to go.

I was listening to a Dhamma talk the other day where the speaker was saying that the end of suffering is nothing really remarkable. It's simply when you've had a problem in the mind and then the problem has been solved, and there's that moment of release, spaciousness, rest "Ahhh." He was advising that you learn how to appreciate that "Ahhh" because that's what the Buddha was talking about.

Which is underselling the Buddha pretty badly. As the Buddha himself said, total dispassion, without trace, total letting go: That's what we're after. He says when you see the goal, you've seen the deathless, you haven't seen just a moment of Ahhh. It's a lot more impressive than that.

So we're going to a good place this way. And it requires that, as we walk along, we use both feet, both legs, alternating, insight, tranquility, insight, tranquility. You can't hop your way to nibbāna, so learn how to walk with some skill.