

General Talk  
25-Oct-00

BV: Do you sit every day? (Laughs)

It's a good idea to do it. Everybody needs quiet time. And they think that they need to do things to relax, sit down and watch television, or relaxing that way, or doing all kinds of different things. But actually all of these things have a tendency to cause tension to arise even more; you don't really relax; you just dull out. And there's a big difference.

Now one of the things with this practice, is that it's not just about being in quiet time; it's being aware of what your mind is doing in the present moment, how your mind grabs on to different things, causing all kinds of emotional problems and tensions to arise, how your mind gets caught by likes and dislikes, and all of these different kinds of things cause more and more tension to arise in your body and in your mind.

So when you begin meditating, you're actually starting to watch how your mind works, not only with the time that you sit in meditation, but try to watch how your mind acts and reacts over and over and over again. And when we start becoming a little bit more sensitive to the kind of tensions and tightnesses that arise in your body and in your mind, you start recognizing that these are kind of painful, and it causes a lot of upset. So what we want to do is learn how to with our daily activities, watch tightnesses arise and try to let go of them whenever you can see them, when you can remember.

A lot of people, they get headaches very easily. And what's the cause of the headache? Tension. What's the cause of the tension? Taking thoughts and feelings very personally, and then not liking the way they are. By that, I mean if you have thoughts of: "I want this to be this way." And then when it's not that way, what happens in your mind? It's causes a lot of pain and tension and tightness. And over a

period of time, it really does have a lot of pains in it, and this is what the Buddha called the First Noble Truth.

We have a lot of instances where there's a lot of pain and suffering that arise. And always the cause of the pain is you're taking these thoughts and feelings personally. It's the "I like it, I don't like it" mind. And that causes a lot of tension in your mind, just to start off with. And then, the next thing that comes up is you start having thoughts about the like or dislike. If you like something, you want it to stay; you don't want it to stop; you want it to keep going. And then when it fades away and changes into something else, you start thinking about, how good that was, and, not seeing what you're doing right now, and that causes more and more tension to arise too.

The Buddha was very specific when he was talking about learning how to relax your mind, learning how to let go of the tensions in your body. Now, when you're practicing the mindfulness of breathing, on the in-breath, you relax. You relax the tightness anywhere in your body, but especially the tightness in your head. That's always there first. On the out-breath, you relax again. So you're continually opening up, and relaxing all of these tensions and tightness just as they start to arise. As you do that more and more, you start to see how your mind tends to grab on to things, how your mind tends to hold, and try to control, and try to make things be the way you want them to be.

So, with this practice, what we're really learning how to do, is pay attention, a little bit more closely, to both mind, and body, paying attention so that you can see how you cause yourself tightnesses and tensions, and you also see how you can let go of those tightnesses and tensions.

The more you can relax, for periods of time, the less pain you have, the less suffering there is, the less you take all of these things personally. But it's kind of like when you first start out, you have something occur, and you don't like it and you try to control it and you try to make it to be the way you want it to be, and then there's all of this pain. And then you notice it and you start letting it go, and

you start relaxing, but it's like having an electric hotplate. You can unplug it, but the heat is still there, and it takes some time for that heat to dissipate. It doesn't happen right away. It'd be nice if it did, but the truth is, it just doesn't. So we have, the stronger our attachment is to these thoughts and feelings, the longer it takes for those thoughts and feelings, when you start recognizing and relaxing, the longer it takes to let them go.

The interesting thing, is that we have a lot of habitual habits; we have a lot of ideas of how we want things to be, and before you start meditating, you're walking around just getting caught from one habitual habit to the next one. And your emotional life is like a roller coaster, up and down, and up and down, and that's the way most people are, that aren't very aware of their mind, or the tensions in their body.

Over a period of time of being able to relax the tightnesses and tension, let go of the identification with all of these thoughts and feeling, over a period of time, you don't have such high highs, but you don't have such low lows, either. When you, over a period of time, you will, start to see more and more clearly, how you are the cause of your own tension.

One of the things that's really been a shock for me, since I've come back from Asia, is, how much people are trying to blame someone else for their problems. I mean the courts are full of this. But, when we start taking responsibility for our own happiness, when we really start to pay attention, we start to see that we are the cause of our happiness, and we are the cause of our pain. It's not out there. It's what you do with what happens during the day. As you keep on opening and relaxing, you'll start to see more and more clearly that the thing that you wanted to happen, in a particular way, didn't happen that way, and after a period of time, it turns out to be all right. This is where you start to gain some mental balance. When it gets to be all right, you start seeing things in a different way.

Now the real difference between psychology and meditation, is psychology is always asking the question: "Why?" "Why is it like

that?" And trying to find the answers with that question. But Buddhism isn't interested in "Why?" Buddhism is interested in: "How the process works." How you get caught by these mental tensions and tightness, how you identify with these tensions and tightnesses, and how you can let them go.

So, when you practice Buddhism, you're starting to see more and more clearly that this is an impersonal process. You don't ask emotions to come up; you don't ask dissatisfaction to come up; you don't ask pains to come up. They come up by themselves. And the more you take these thoughts and feelings personally, the more pain you cause yourself. And the more involved you get in thinking about, feeling, the bigger that pain becomes.

But when you start seeing this as a process, and you start noticing: "How did it arise first?" First there's a feeling that arises, and after that there's the like or dislike of the feeling, and after that, there's the thoughts about the feeling, and your habitual habits. So the more you can be aware that this is an impersonal process, the less you're going to get caught by the emotional roller coaster ride.

In one of the shorter suttas, the Buddha praised the meditation of, he called it *annata*, the impersonal nature of things, not-self. And in this particular sutta, he encourages you to realize that everything that arises is not self, and at first it comes as a reminder: "This isn't me; this isn't mine." And then there's the letting go of the tension caused by that identification with it. And he praised this meditation so much that he said: "You can indeed attain *nibbāna*, just by doing this meditation."

It's not talked about in that other book, the one that talks about forty different kinds of meditation; this is a different one.

So if you want to try this practice, you can do it with the breath. On the in-breath, not self, relax. On the out-breath, not self, relax. Every kind of distraction, every kind of feeling, every kind of thought, you mentally remind yourself: "It's not me, it's not mine." Relax. And this actually works quite well. Although I did do it, I didn't do it for very

long, because I told the meditation teacher that that's what I was doing, and got scolded because that wasn't what he was teaching. (Laughs)

The more aware we are, of subtle tightnesses and feelings when they first arise, the more quickly we can see the trap, and let it go.

In the Middle Length Sayings, there's one discourse that starts talking about the earth element. The earth element is solidity, hardness, lightness. But the Buddha was saying if you take truly dirty things, and throw it on the earth, the earth accepts it. I mean you can... excrement, and urinate and throw garbage, and vomit and all different kinds of things, but the earth doesn't... it's not shaken by that. And right after that he said: "And make your mind like the earth." When agreeable or disagreeable things happen, remember, open and relax. Let go of the judgment of good and bad, liking and disliking, and taking it personally. And he goes through all of the elements with that.

So it's kind of interesting, if you can do that, but the thing is, it does take practice. It does take setting aside some time each day, for quiet time. And that can help remind you, during your daily activities, to be a little bit more aware. But we have a lot of habits, and the old habits are hard to die. So you're still going to get caught, occasionally with these different thoughts, and feelings, and emotions that arise, and it's ok to get caught, but as you become more and more attuned to having a mind that's peaceful, and open, and relaxed, the more quickly you'll notice when your mind is not that way, and then you'll be able to let go more easily. This is what the Buddha's teaching is all about. When you start to do this, you stop being so caught up in emotions, and reacting over and over again, and you start to become more and more human being, more and more open and aware, and not knocked off balance by thoughts, and emotions, and feelings, and wants, and dislikes, and all of these other things that come up and knock us away. And the more balance you have in your life, the easier life becomes.

Ok, I'm just going to make this one a short talk today. So now, let's share some merit.

*May suffering ones, be suffering free  
And the fear struck, fearless be  
May the grieving shed all grief  
And may all beings find relief.*

*May all beings share this merit that we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness.*

*May beings inhabiting space and earth  
Devas and nagas of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours.*

*May they long protect the Buddha's dispensation.  
Sadhu . . . Sadhu . . . Sadhu .*