

Totally Secure

August 17, 2005

Try to be true to the breath. There's competition with the music outside tonight, but the competition doesn't destroy the breath. It's still there. You just have to find in your body where the sensations of breathing are, and stick with them. Look after them. If the breathing doesn't feel comfortable, you can adjust it. Make it longer or shorter, deeper or more shallow—whatever feels really good for the body right now. As for everything else, you can let it pass. Basically it's not your issue, unless you *make* it your issue. It's not your karma, unless you make it your karma. You have the choice.

So you just stay right here with the breathing. And watch out for when the mind starts leaving the breath, starts fabricating other thoughts, other worlds, fabricating the past, fabricating the future. This is one of the things the mind is really good at, fabrication. The Pali word is *sankhara*. The problem with this fabrication is that it creates a lot of suffering for the mind. This is not to say that sankhara or fabrication doesn't serve purposes. It serves a lot of purposes. It's because of fabrication that we can think, that we can talk, that we can function. But the problem is that we're not clear on what we're fabricating. Sometimes we think we're creating a nice little thought world for the mind to dwell in, and it starts to turn on you. It develops fangs. It comes back and bites you.

Or the idea can get into your head that you want a certain sight or sound or smell or taste or tactile sensation, and you can build it up into something really attractive, and you find yourself unable to do it without it. You've got to go out looking for it, and the things you do in the course of looking for it may not be all that skillful. Oftentimes you find that when you actually get what you were looking for, there's not much there. You've gone through all that trouble, created all that suffering for yourself, often suffering for other people, and yet you have nothing to show for it.

This is why the Buddha pointed out that one of the major factors in the practice is to understand this process of fabrication. One of the definitions of discernment or wisdom is all-around knowing of this process of fabrication. As you start by looking at what you do, and what you say, you see that this is why we have those precepts. What are you doing with your body? What are you creating? What are you creating with your words?

It's interesting to reflect that of all five of the precepts, the Buddha placed the most importance on number four, the one against lying. It's bad enough when we

create fabrications that are reasonable replica of what's actually happening of what's actually true, but so often we create fabrications that are false. And the more false fabrications we create, the harder it is for us to find the truth. We don't like to hear lies from other people, but we tend to be more indulgent with our own lies. Yet if we lie, two things happen. One is, we're bound to hear more lies from the people around us, and two, after a while, we start losing track of what's really true, what's false, within our own mind.

The mind does have this tendency to hide things from itself. The more you get involved with elaborating the truth or skewing the truth, the more you have to hide—and the harder it is to get down to the truth of things inside the mind.

So in terms of the precepts, the Buddha has us be very careful about what kind of world we're fabricating with our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, so that at the very least the mind isn't clouded with a lot of falsehood. There's not a lot of denial in the mind. Otherwise, when you sit down and meditate, you start thinking about the things you did and said, and you don't like to think about them. Yet there they are: the elephant in the living room. If you try to pretend it's not there, you're closing off large areas of your mind that you won't be able to gain any insight into.

So this principle of truthfulness is very important. It's one of those virtues that has a lot of facets to it. Not only do you want to admit the truth about what's going on inside and about the things you've been doing outside, but you also want to create an environment where the truth becomes clear, where you're true. When you make up your mind to do something, you stick with that determination. You want to be true to the practice, because it's only by being true to the practice that you find the truth that the Buddha promises: There is an end to suffering. You don't get to see that unless you're a true person.

This is how concentration gets developed. You really stick with the object of your concentration no matter what. It's like having a gyroscope in the ship. No matter which direction the waves tilt the ship, the gyroscope stays on an even keel. No matter what happens outside, no matter what happens inside, you want to keep your mind on an even keel. That requires a quality of truthfulness, both in the sense of being true to your determination and also seeing exactly what is actually happening in the mind so that when you find yourself leaning in one direction—leaning toward liking or disliking, or toward delusion or fear—you can right yourself. You can get the mind back in a state where it's not leaning, so that it always knows what its intentions are.

We spend so much time trying to second-guess other people's intentions that we lose sight of our own. This is why you want to keep your attention focused,

realizing that the fabrications that come from within the mind are the big problem. What other people fabricate, that's their issue. Your issue is how you maintain your even keel. As you do this, you begin to see the process of fabrication of the mind more and more clearly all the time. That enables you to see through not only false fabrications but also true fabrications.

Ultimately, no matter how true or false these processes are, they still are processes. They still are fabrications. There still is an element of stress involved in them. You want to be able to get the mind truly above that. But you can't see their truth if you're cluttering the mind up with a lot of reasons for denial or halfhearted efforts.

This quality of truthfulness is really important. It forms the thread all the way through the practice. You're sitting here try to stay with the breath. There's music outside. Are you going to be true to the breath or you're going to grow ranting and raving about the music? You've got the choice.

If you stay true to the breath throughout the hour, you'll come up with a lot more to show for the hour. And you develop an important habit in the mind. Because no matter how wonderful or extravagant your mental fabrications might be, they always keep running into those basic old facts: aging, illness, and death. The truth always intrudes. But if your fabrications are in line with the truth, they aren't threatened by the truth.

In other words, when aging, illness, and death come, what you really want is a good solid state of mind that's not knocked around by things. It can keep its even keel because that's the kind of fabrication you've been working on: one that's much less threatened by these three big facts of life.

Even more so when you can use your concentration as a basis for discernment, for insight, into the way the mind creates things, fabricates things, to the point where you can stop the processes: You then come across a happiness, a sense of well-being, that's not threatened by anything at all. That's the kind of truth that isn't threatened by any other truth. It lies beyond all the truths of fabrication. But until you get there, there's always a sense of being threatened. This whole series of make-believe worlds that we keep building: It's so easy for them to come tumbling down. So try to get the mind to a place where it isn't threatened by the truth. It's only then that you can be really secure.