

At Home in Jhana

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As the Buddha once said, there's no happiness other than peace. He was talking about peace of mind. You might think there are forms of happiness you get from very aroused states of mind, very active and running-around states of mind, but that's not really happiness. The mind's true happiness is when it's at peace.

Yet it's so rarely at peace. It's traveling around all the time, jumping from one thought to the next. If you were to take a magic marker and try to trace where your thoughts went in the course of the day, you'd have marks scribbled all over the world. Sometimes outside of the world. There would be a huge tangled mess. Yet that's our normal day-to-day way of living with the mind: traveling here, traveling there, the process called samsara.

We're used to thinking of samsara as going from one lifetime to the next, but it also includes the mind's wandering from one thought to the next, one thought world to another thought world. It moves on, moves on, moves on, because it can't stay in any of these worlds. It's like going into a house that's ready to fall apart. You've got to leave the house and go into the next one. That one is ready to fall apart, so you have to leave that and go into the next one. No wonder the mind gets worn out, at loose ends. What you've got to do is build it a house where it can stay. Ultimately of course, you know the Buddha's statement that he's seen the housebuilder and will not build a house again. That's awakening. But before you get to that point, you've got to learn how to build good houses. That's why we practice concentration: to give the mind a place where it can stay, gather its energy, gather its strength.

And you'll experience at least some peace of mind along the path. We just chanted the different factors of the path. The first one that the Buddha discovered was right concentration. You probably know the story. When he was practicing austerities for six years, he finally reached the point when he realized that no one had ever practiced austerities greater than he had, and yet he hadn't gotten anywhere. He had tried forcing himself not to breathe, going on extremely small quantities of food, yet that still hadn't brought him the peace of mind, the awakening he had sought.

Now, the fact that he was able to stop and take stock of this was one of the really amazing points in the story of his life, because as you can imagine: What kept him going all those six years if not a sense of pride? And he finally came to

the point where he was willing to give up his pride, admit the path he had followed was not working.

So the question arose, what other possibilities were there? He thought of a time when he was a child: He happened to be sitting under a tree while his father was plowing, and his mind naturally entered the first jhana, with directed thought and evaluation. Apparently he was directing his thoughts to the breath, evaluating the breath till it gave rise to a sense of rapture and pleasure, a sense of fullness and ease, that came from his mind's not being involved in any unskillful thoughts at all. He asked himself, could this be the way? And the response arose in the mind: Yes.

So he followed that way and, as he discovered, there are other factors of the path as well. But right concentration is the central one. These different levels of jhana are a home for the mind in which you settle down with the breath and a sense of ease and well-being. Then as you stay with this longer and longer, you begin to realize that you've got it all right here: everything you need for peace of mind, a sense of well-being and ease, the satisfaction that comes with a sense of physical and mental fullness or rapture. You can find it all with the breath. It's simply a matter of sticking with it and developing a sensitivity to what kind of breathing really does feel good right now. In other words, you've got all the raw materials for happiness right here. You don't have to go traveling around anywhere else. Just pay attention to what you've got. The mind has a habit of fabricating things, so have it fabricate right concentration.

You've got the breath, which is bodily fabrication. You've got directed thought and evaluation, which are verbal fabrication. And you've got feelings and labels or perceptions, which are mental fabrications. So instead of fabricating worlds outside, thought worlds that can go who knows where, you fix up what you've got here.

It's as if you have a little shack that you haven't been paying attention to, but you can fix it up. You can turn it into a home by adding a few additions. You can add the second jhana, the third jhāna, and the fourth jhana, so that it becomes a spacious home, especially when you take equanimity of the fourth jhana and apply it to the dimensions of infinite space or infinite consciousness. It's an enormous home. But everything you need is right here. It's simply a matter of taking the time and developing the sensitivity so that you can stop your wandering around and develop what's called *vihāra-dhamma*, your home for the mind.

When your home is comfortable enough, you can light it, you can decorate it in all kinds of ways. In other words, you can take this house of the present moment and turn it into a real home. And you find ultimately that's not just a

resting place. All the things you need to know for awakening are right here as well. After all, these states of right concentration are made up of form, feelings, perceptions, thought fabrications, and consciousness. These are all the raw materials you need to understand to see where your attachments are. As the Buddha said, the knowledge that puts an end to what they call mental fermentation or mental effluents—the things that darken the mind, that trouble the mind: The knowledge of putting an end to these things comes from being in one of these states of jhana. All of the foremost attainments are built on jhana.

You turn around and look at the state of concentration you've got. After having constructed it, you deconstruct it. Look at the raw materials you've got and see that no matter how wonderful a house you build, it's still subject to decay and to falling apart. It depends on the effort of fabrication to maintain it. When you see that, and it really hits home, you get disenchanted with it and you can let that go as well.

And instead of suddenly find yourself back out on the street, without any shelter, you're actually in a place where you don't need shelter anymore. You're gone beyond even the need for a home.

But in the meantime, get good at building this house, keeping it in good shape. Learn how to be good repairman, because without this home for the mind, you're wandering around on the streets. With it, you've got a shelter for the mind, you've got a place where you can fix food for the mind. It's a place to rest, a place to sit and examine yourself to gain knowledge.

One of the amazing things about the Buddha's teachings is that everything you need to know for true happiness is right here. It's simply that you haven't sensitized yourself to it enough. You haven't understood properly how you take the raw materials you have here and create suffering out of them. And you haven't realized that you don't need to create that suffering. You can create a sense of ease and well-being instead. You take these raw materials you've been carrying around as loads and you place them down in the ground, and they turn into a path that can take you to true happiness.

So allow the mind to settle down. When it wants to wander off, keep reminding it, "Where are you going? What are you looking for? Are you looking for trouble? Everything you need is right here." It's just a matter of learning to look carefully enough, consistently enough, steadily enough, so that you begin to see the subtleties of the potentials you've got here, so that this house of the present moment does become a home.

Then you can stop all your random wandering, and allow the mind to find a peace that really is a true happiness. It's so true that ultimately when you find the

highest level happiness, it's a happiness that doesn't have to depend on anything at all.

In the meantime, the happiness of jhana depends on being mindful, being alert, being persistent in your efforts to be as skillful as possible in maintaining the state. Ultimately, as you get really good at maintaining this state, you get to the point where you understand it thoroughly, so thoroughly that you can go beyond it. That's the true peace, the true happiness that the Buddha was talking about. It's simply up to you to decide if you want to find it within yourself, or if you're just going to leave it as words that the Buddha said.

Everything he said was for the sake of our putting it into practice. He never philosophized simply for the sake of philosophizing. All of his teachings were meant to be used as tools, ways of thinking, ways of looking, that have certain results: putting an end to suffering and bringing about true happiness.

So make sure that the tools that the Buddha left for us get put to good use. If you use them for the purpose for which he intended them, you're going to benefit. It's all up to you.