

Mindfulness of Breathing (65) Fading of Attachment

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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I've been talking over these last days about the thirteenth step of mindfulness of breathing as observation. Observation is settling back and observing the inconstancy of phenomena. Observing how things are constantly renewing, but also constantly passing.

With the appearing and disappearing of our experience moment by moment, it is certainly sometimes unfortunate that things pass away. Sometimes we are very fortunate that "Finally, it is no longer here." Sometimes we are fortunate that things are arising, and sometimes what is arising is unfortunate. It is painful. Sometimes it's neutral.

In observing, there is no prioritizing or putting a value on the particular arisings and passings that occur. We are not discounting or celebrating things. We just see that this is the nature of the flow of sensations and experiences. When we are settled, peaceful, and not overlaying concepts and ideas on top of experience, we see that what we experience is the flow of sensations and experience.

The great value of this perspective is not to celebrate it or be depressed by it. Rather, it becomes a reference point for how valuable it is not to cling to anything. To not contract around or resist any of our experience – especially in meditation. In real life, perhaps certain things should be held on to or resisted. However, in meditation, this perspective is learning to free ourselves from any movement of being for or against – holding on or pushing away – because doing that doesn't work. And because this ability to observe – to not be engaged in or attached to things – begins feeling so good. This is where freedom is.

In the teachings of the Buddha, the core catalyst for freedom is this experience, this deep insight into inconstancy. The freer we become, the more inconstancy is a support for greater freedom. The freer we are, the more we see and recognize how we are trying to hold on to what is constantly changing. We see how we have left the flow. We can see how we create wind drag when we put our hand out the window of a car. We create a similar drag if we put our hands into a river and try to stop it. It does not work if we pick up a handful of water and leave the river, thinking we still have the river.

There are many ways in which we can recognize that we have left the flow of inconstancy – the flow of life – because we have gotten excessively attached, involved, or are clinging. To see that in meditation. To see that we are better backing off and not clinging. It is not so interesting to cling or want.

An inner psychological change begins to happen. Some of that change is relaxing the search. It is relaxing trying to do or to get something. Relaxing the need to know and the search to know – because all that is too much.

It's like leaning forward when we can just settle back. Then all our attachments start feeling like wind drag. They interfere with the radiance of the heart, the beauty of the mind, the freedom of our lives. We see that the clinging, the attachments, and the things we hold onto diminish us.

There starts to be disinterest in – a fading away of – jealousy, envy, conceit, craving, hatred, and resentment. I can go on. The list is long of things we begin recognizing as: "Oh, this doesn't really serve me. I'm not so interested in this anymore."

It's not like I have to be a good Buddhist, thinking, "It's bad that I'm doing this, and I have to stop." Rather, it's like: "I'm no longer interested in this. This is less and less interesting to do." Or: "I've been resentful for 30 years,

and I think I'm getting tired of it. I think I see that it's not so interesting." Or: "I've been chasing after having the perfect physique for decades. I'm not really interested in always presenting myself with the perfect human physique, whatever that might be."

We start losing interest in always wanting to make more money, having status, or all these things we've been chasing. There's a healthy: "Oh, wait a minute, this doesn't serve me! This is not the best place to be. This is not the most wonderful way to be, being preoccupied with these things. I'm beginning to know something better. I know something about freedom, ease, and peace."

I want to stress again that the primary reference point for what I am talking about now is meditation. Outside of meditation, you might argue: "Well, wait a minute, isn't it okay to do it here? We need to do it here." I don't want to get into those discussions. I want you to discover in meditation that you don't have to pursue the perfect physique, more money, more status, or more whatever it is that you're trying to do. In meditation itself, you can feel that it is better and easier just to let go, to not be involved.

Having a qualitatively high experience of freedom, ease, and peace – where we are no longer grasping, holding, resisting, or contracting – becomes your teacher. It's not so interesting to debate with me: "Wait a minute, aren't we supposed to hold on here or resist that?" Instead, for a real spiritual life, you should be debating with yourself. This practice of freedom gets interesting – comes alive – when you have a deep reference point for peace and freedom. Explore and find out what is really true for yourself.

By observing inconstancy, there is a fading away of interest in some of our attachments. Then there is also the fading away of the attachments themselves. The Pali word for the fourteenth step of *ānāpānasati* is *virāga*. There are two different translations of this word, and the one I'll stress today is "fading away." One observes the fading away of these attachments – the fading away of our addictive interest in certain things that are not serving us anymore. There is fading away.

This speaks to something important about the path of liberation in Buddhism. There is a tendency to look for a sudden experience that is the key to it all – that unlocks it all and then we are free forever. A more mature way of seeing liberation is that a lot of it has to do with just fading away, wearing away, or dropping away, drop by drop. Everything dries up or falls away. The phenomenon of our attachment evaporates.

Rāga, the root of the word *virāga*, can mean a dye for coloring cloth. The prefix *vi* means a fading away or separating of that dye. So one of the meanings of *virāga* is for the dye to fade away. When you dye clothes and leave them in the sun too long, they get bleached and the color fades away. Or the color fades away over time. Fading away.

When we really feel the unsatisfactoriness, off-ness, and discomfort of attachment, clinging, and addiction – all these movements of the mind we have – we start to feel: "Ahh, this is lightening up. It's loosening up." A cloud lightens or lifts with letting go and relaxing.

Then the mindfulness practice is to be available to that fading away – to be open and allow for it. If we go right back into clinging, we reinforce more clinging. We strengthen the capacity to cling, attach, resist, and be addicted to things. But once we start feeling the process of fading away, then mindfulness practice is to be available to that fading – available to it so we don't reinforce the opposite. So:

One trains, breathing in observing fading away.

One trains, breathing out observing fading away.

That is one of the meanings of *virāga*. Tomorrow, I'll talk about the second meaning, which is dispassion. That is often how it is translated. This is probably not a very good translation, but that's for tomorrow. Thank you. And this comes to an end.