

The Myth of Freedom

and the Way of Meditation

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IV

Working with the Emotions

The Dualistic Barrier

AS WE HAVE discussed, boredom is very important in the practice of sitting meditation; there is no other way to reach the depths of meditation practice except through boredom. But at the same time, we must look further at the desire for credentials. Even experiencing boredom or relating with boredom could itself be another game, another way of creating a sense of comfort, a sense of security in the practice of meditation. Something else must be dealt with in addition to experiencing boredom, and this something else is the daily living situation involving love and hate, depression and so forth, the subtle but fundamental emotions.

Although we may be able to accomplish smoothly the vipashyana practice of relating with the breathing, still we cannot ignore this large area of potential and unexpected disturbances. You may finish an ideal sitting meditation period in which you experienced boredom, and then you go out into the living room and decide to make a call to your friend and realize that you haven't paid your telephone bill and the telephone is disconnected. And you get outraged: "But that's not my fault, my wife misplaced the bill," or "They have no right to do this," or whatever.

Little things like that happen all the time. If we experience such situations, then we begin to realize that our practice is credential-oriented, that there is a belief in some kind of basic harmony. The problems of everyday life are a way of destroying our credentials, our comfort and security, and they present us with an opportunity to relate with our emotions.

Although we may be able to see the simplicity of the discursive thought process, still there are very strong emotions with which it is extremely difficult and quite challenging to work. In working with the emotions we are dealing not only with the fifth skandha, "consciousness," but also with the fourth skandha, "concept," "intellect." The emotions are composed of energy, which can be likened to water, and a dualistic thought process, which could be likened to pigment or paint. When energy and thought are mixed together they become the vivid and colorful emotions. Concept gives the energy a particular location, a sense of relationship, which makes the emotions vivid and strong. Fundamentally, the reason why emotions are discomfoting, painful, frustrating, is because our relationship to the emotions is not quite clear.

At the level of the fifth skandha the structure of ego has become so efficient that there is a conflict between the administration of ego and the central ignorance itself. It is as if the king's minister had become more powerful than the king himself. This seems to be the point where emotions become painful, because you are not quite certain what your relationship to your emotions is. There is tremendous conflict, a feeling that you are being overpowered by your emotions, that you are losing your basic identity, your center of command.

So the pain of emotion comes from this conflict; the relationship is always ambivalent. However, if a person is actually able to relate fully and thoroughly with the emotions, then they cease to become an external problem. One is able to make very close contact with the emotions and the war between your emotions and yourself; you and your projections, you and the world outside, becomes transparent. This involves removing the dualistic barriers set up by concepts, which is the experience of shunyata, the absence of relative concepts, emptiness.

Actually, we do not see things completely as they are. Generally we perceive something, and then we look. Looking in this case is the act of imposing names and associations on things. Seeing things means accepting what they are, but looking means unnecessary effort to make sure that you are safe, that nothing is going to confuse you in your relationship to the world. So we create our security by putting things into categories, naming them, by using relative terms to identify their interrelationships, how they fit together. And this security brings temporary happiness and comfort.

This very crude way of finding landmarks in terms of our projections is very childish, and one has to repeat the same game again and again. There is no attempt to deal with projections as exciting and fluid situations at all; instead the world is seen as being absolutely solid and stiff. Everything is frozen movement, frozen space, solidified. We see the world as having an extremely hard facade, a metallic or plastic quality. We see the colors as they are, but somehow they are plastic colors rather than rainbow colors. And this solid quality is the dualistic barrier that we have been talking about. Which is not to say that a person should not feel the texture of a stone

or a brick as solid. The physical situation of solidity has no relation to psychological solidity. We are dealing here with mental solidity—harshness, a metallic quality. Actually, it is extremely interesting that we see only our own solid version of the world. So perception is very much individualized, centralized on self-consciousness.

It is impossible immediately to experience shunyata—that is, absence of concept, absence of the dualistic barrier. We must start with a simple practice in the beginning, and then we begin to perceive the transparent quality of thoughts and emotions. Then we must also try to step beyond the relational situation of transparency—that is, the sense of “you” seeing the transparency of thoughts and emotions. In other words, the thought process and the emotions are transparent and they are taking place in the midst of nowhere, in space. That spacious quality, when everything operates and occurs in space, is the positive space of skillful means, of working with everyday life-situations. In fact, the creativity and the positive aspect of the emotions and life-situations can only be seen through experiencing the space rather than the product. If a person’s relationship to space is developed properly, perceived properly, then there is no hesitation at all.

We are speaking here of becoming *one* with the emotions. This is different from and in contrast to the usual approach of suppressing them or acting them out. If we are suppressing our emotions, it is extremely dangerous because we are regarding them as something terrible, shameful, which means that our relationship to our emotions is not really open. Once we try to suppress them, sooner or later they are going to step out and explode.

There is another possibility. If you do not suppress your emotions, then you really allow yourself to come out and be carried away by them. This way of dealing with the emotions also comes from a kind of panic; your relationship with your emotions has not been properly reconciled. This is another way of escaping from the actual emotion, another kind of release, a false release. It is a confusion of mind and matter, thinking that the physical act of practicing emotions, of putting them into effect, supposedly will cure the emotions, relieve their irritation. But generally it reinforces them, and the emotions become more powerful. The relationship between the emotions and mind is not quite clear here.

So the intelligent way of working with emotions is to try to relate with their basic substance, the abstract quality of the emotions, so to speak. The basic "isness" quality of the emotions, the fundamental nature of the emotions, is just energy. And if one is able to relate with energy, then the energies have no conflict with you. They become a natural process. So trying to suppress or getting carried away by the emotions become irrelevant once a person is completely able to see their basic characteristic, the emotions as they are, which is shunyata. The barrier, the wall between you and your projections, the hysterical and paranoid aspect of your relationship to your projections, has been removed—not exactly removed, but seen through. When there is no panic involved in dealing with the emotions, then you can deal with them completely, properly. Then you are like someone who is completely skilled in his profession, who does not panic, but just does his work completely, thoroughly.

We have been discussing how to deal with conscious-

ness, the last stage of the development of ego, and we have also dealt with the prior stage of concept. When we speak of “dealing” with them, it is not a question of eliminating them completely but of really seeing them and transmuting their confused qualities into transcendental qualities. We still use the energies of thought, the energies of the emotions and the energies of concept. Generally, when the idea of ego is presented, the immediate reaction on the part of the audience is to regard it as a villain, an enemy. You feel you must destroy this ego, this me, which is a masochistic and suicidal approach. People tend to think this way because, usually when we speak of spirituality, we tend to think that we are fighting the bad; we are good, spirituality is the ultimate good, the epitome of good, and the other side is bad. But true spirituality is not a battle; it is the ultimate practice of non-violence. We are not regarding any part of us as being a villain, an enemy, but we are trying to use everything as a part of the natural process of life. As soon as a notion of polarity between good and bad develops, then we are caught in spiritual materialism, which is working to achieve happiness in a simple-minded sense, on the way to egohood. So the dualistic wall is not something we have to destroy or eliminate or exorcise. But having seen the emotions as they are, we have more material with which to work creatively. This makes it quite clear that the notion of samsara is dependent upon the notion of nirvana, and the notion of nirvana is dependent upon the notion of samsara; they are interdependent. If there were no confusion, there would be no wisdom.