Questions

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 11:10

Sometimes the instructions seem kind of complicated, and I want to just give you permission to not think about them or worry about them or try to do them too much.

One of my teachers, my Burmese teacher, says nothing he tells us is anything for us to do. But it is information that perhaps wouldn't have occurred to us. And having that information in your exploration of your experience, just as you are practicing, being aware—having that information can offer different ways that your mind will start to explore experience without you really having to do it.

So be really relaxed around the instructions. As we're offering them over these days, it can sound like a lot, but really it can be very simple. Just notice what is obvious in this moment of experience. As the mindfulness starts to get more continuous, it strengthens the power of our ability to see more and more. We don't have to try to find all of these things. Just do your practice. Just keep tapping on that scooter. Keep noticing moment after moment: Am I aware, and what am I aware of? Anchoring your attention to support this in your breathing, or in the body sensations, or in hearing—whichever is most congenial for you.

We have a few minutes for questions this morning.

Question about mindfulness of the body and the sense doors.

Mindfulness of the body is about being as aware as you can be in the moment of what's happening at all the different sense doors. The mindfulness of the body is actually primarily at the touch sense, the way the Buddha described it. He described many instructions around mindfulness of the body, but mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of posture, mindfulness of elements are more about the touch sense. The other senses are included in the fourth foundation of mindfulness.

But don't worry about that too much. If you're noticing hearing, if you're noticing taste and touch—all those six things are going on, and the pleasant, unpleasant, neutral qualities associated with all of those. But this elemental piece I was describing, I wasn't describing the elemental nature of sight or of sound or of taste. There are different kinds of explorations in that realm. So primarily the instructions are around the touch sense of the body.

Question about drifting into dream states while using the breath as an anchor.

That's what's happening. So what we try to do is to wake up to what is happening. We don't try to change it so much, but we try to bring mindfulness to it.

What you're noticing is that there's a breath and then you may get lost into that dream state a little bit. There's probably some images coming, and there's maybe a little bit of getting lost. At some point you wake up into that dream state, and there's a recognition: "Oh, images or a dreamy quality is happening." At that moment, you can just acknowledge that—"Oh, dreaminess is happening"—and then you can choose to come back to the breath, because you're now aware again.

It's also possible to watch the mind kind of move in and out of that dreaminess and be completely aware in that dreamy space. So check in and see how aware you are. My guess is that probably what's happening is that you're waking up into that dreaminess.

That kind of state happens partly because the mind is settling down. The dreamy quality comes—it's kind of a subtler kind of thinking that arises when the mind settles a little bit, but there's not a lot of energy. One way you can play with that, one of the best ways I find when I get into that kind of state, is just open your eyes and pay attention to the breath with your eyes just open and down-focused. That gives just a little bit of energy into the system that will help keep you alert. You'll find that your eyes will close and you'll drift back into dreaminess.

None of it is a problem. We just wake up, we're aware when we're aware, and we make adjustments as we know is skillful. But to try to say "dreaming is bad, I need to be with my breath"—that's adding a kind of pressure and aversion to your meditation that's not necessary. So you notice, "Oh, dreaminess," and that's okay.

And then you may notice that two or three times, and if it feels like the dreaminess is taking over, open your eyes.

A question arose: "I was feeling the wetness you were talking about, the fluidity in my mouth, and I got an image of a dripping spring. Is that commentary? Should I note it as commentary?"

My guess is that this is your mind recognizing the experience in a visual way. It's probably in that realm of perception—like when you're hearing a sound and your mind registers "car." It's an identification of experience. Your mind is trying to create a recognition of what this is.

You don't need to stop it. You've just noticed that it happened. You can note it if you wish. Sometimes I find it really helpful to acknowledge that even though the eyes are closed, the mind is exploring experience through the visual field. Images arise. I find it helpful to use "seeing" as an acknowledgment when that happens—just recognizing the process of what's going on.

I wouldn't try to stop that kind of experience, but noticing that it happens is helpful, because that's a prime place where we recognize something. You said there was the image of a dripping spring. If you hadn't noticed that, what might have happened next is that you'd be off someplace looking at a spring in Hawaii, and then suddenly you'd be on the beach, and then you're gone.

So the fact that you see it gives you the opportunity to recognize: this is just the mind doing its recognizing process. Then you simply come back to the feeling of the wetness. And often when you recognize these images, they disappear. Did it disappear when you recognized it?

Yes.

This is how awareness works. We notice, we acknowledge, and the mind naturally settles back into direct experience.

So enjoy your day of mindfulness on this snowy day.

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