

FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a basic approach to the spiritual journey that is common to all traditions of Buddhism. But before we begin to look at that approach to spirituality, we should have some idea of what is meant by spirituality itself. Some say that spirituality is a way of attaining a better kind of happiness, transcendental happiness. Others see it as a benevolent way to develop power over others. Still others say the point of spirituality is to acquire power and magical energies so we can change our bad world into a good world or purify the

world through miracles. It seems that any of these points of view is irrelevant to the Buddhist approach. According to the buddhadharma, spirituality is relating with the working basis of our existence, which is our state of mind.

There is a problem with our basic life, our basic being. This problem is that we are involved in a continual struggle to survive, to maintain our position. We are continually trying to grasp onto some solid image of ourselves. And then we have to defend that particular fixed conception. So there is warfare, there is confusion, there is passion and aggression; there are all kinds of conflicts. From the Buddhist point of view, the true development of spirituality is cutting through our basic fixation, that clinging, that stronghold of something-or-other which is known as ego.

In order to do that we have to find out what ego is. What is this all about? Who are we? We have to look into our already existing state of mind. And we have to understand what practical step we can take to do that. We are not involved here in a metaphysical discussion about the purpose of life and meaning of spirituality on an abstract level. We are looking at this question from the point of view of a working situation. We need to find some simple thing we can do by way of embarking on the spiritual path.

People have a lot of difficulty in beginning on spiritual practice, because they put a lot of energy into looking for the best and easiest way to get into it. We might have to change our attitude and give up looking for the best or the easiest way. Actually, there is no choice. Whatever approach we take, we will have to deal with what we are already. We have to look at who we are. According to the Buddhist tradition, the working basis of the path and the energy involved in the path is the mind, our own mind that we have working in us all the time.

Spirituality is based on mind. In Buddhism, mind is the distinguishing mark of sentient beings as opposed to rocks or trees or bodies of water. That which possesses discriminating awareness, that which possesses a sense of duality—grasps or rejects something external—that is mind. Fundamentally, it is that which can associate with an “other,” any “something” perceived as different from the perceiver. That is the definition of mind. The traditional Tibetan phrase defining mind—*yul la sems pena sems*—means precisely that: “That which can think of the other, the projection, is mind.”

So by mind we mean something very specific. It is not just something very vague and creepy inside our head or heart, something that just happens as part of the way the wind blows and the grass grows. Rather it is something very concrete. It contains perception, perception that is very uncomplicated, very basic, very precise. Mind develops its particular nature as that perception begins to linger on something other than oneself. That is the mental trick that constitutes mind. The tricky part is that mind makes the fact of perceiving something else stand for the existence of oneself. In fact, it should be the opposite: since the perception starts from oneself, the logic should be: “I exist, therefore the other exists.”

But somehow the hypocrisy of mind is developed to such an extent that it lingers on the other as a way of getting the feedback that it itself exists, which is an erroneous belief fundamentally. It is the fact that the existence of self is questionable that motivates the trick of duality.

This is the mind that is our working basis for the practice of meditation and the development of awareness. But mind is something more than the process of confirming self by the dualistic lingering on the other. Mind also includes what are known as emotions, which are the highlights of mental states. Mind cannot exist without emotions. Pure daydreaming and pure discursive thoughts alone are not enough. Those alone would be too boring. The dualistic trick would wear too thin. So we tend to create waves of emotion which go up and down—passion, aggression, ignorance, pride—all kinds of emotions. We create them deliberately at the beginning, as a game of trying to prove to ourselves that we exist. But eventually the game becomes a hassle; it becomes more than a game and forces us to challenge ourselves more than we intended. It is like a hunter who, for the sport of practicing his shooting, decides to shoot one leg of a deer at a time. But the deer runs very fast, and it appears it might get away altogether. This becomes a total challenge to the hunter who rushes after the deer, now trying to kill it completely, to shoot it in the heart. So the hunter has been challenged and feels defeated by his own game.

Emotions are like this. They are not a requirement for survival; they are a game we developed that went wrong at some point, went sour. In the face of this predicament we feel terribly frustrated and absolutely helpless. Such frustration causes some people to fortify their relationship to the "other" by creating "god" or other projections such as saviors, gurus, mahatmas and so on. We create all kinds of projections as henchmen, hitmen, to enable us to re-dominate our territory. The implicit sense is that through our paying homage to such great beings, they will function as our helpers, as our guarantors of ground.

So we have created a rather neat world. It is bittersweet. Things are amusing, but at the same time, not so amusing. Sometimes things seem terribly funny, but, on the other hand, terribly sad. Life has the quality of a game of ours that has trapped us. The set-up of mind has created the whole thing. We might complain about the government or the economy of the country or the prime rate of interest, but those factors are secondary. The original process at the root of the problems is the competitiveness that we create within ourselves. We have already set up that primeval competitiveness of seeing ourselves only as a reflection of the other. Problematic situations arise automatically as expressions of that. They are our own production, our own neat work. And that is what is called mind.

According to the Buddhist tradition, there are eight types of consciousness and fifty-two types of conceptions and all kinds of other aspects of mind, about which we do not have to go into details. All are largely based on the primeval dualistic approach. There are the

spiritual aspects and the psychological aspects and all sorts of other aspects. All are bound up in the realm of duality, which is ego.

As far as meditation practice is concerned, in meditation we work on *this* thing, rather than trying to sort out the problem from the outside. We work on the projector rather than the projection. We turn inward, instead of trying to sort out external problems of A, B, and C. We work on the creator of duality rather than the creation. That is beginning at the beginning.

There are three main aspects of "this," according to the Buddhist tradition, called in Tibetan *sems*, *rigpa* and *gid*. The basic mind, the simple capacity for duality we have already described, is *sems*. *Rigpa* literally means "intelligence" or "brightness." In colloquial Tibetan, if you say that somebody has *rigpa*, it means he is a clever, sharp fellow. This sharpness of *rigpa* is a kind of side function that develops from the basic mind, *sems*, a kind of lawyer's mentality that everybody develops. It looks at a problem from various different angles and analyzes the possibilities of different ways of approaching it. It looks at the problem in every possible way, inside-out and outside-in.

The third aspect, *gid*, is considered a sense consciousness. Traditionally it is classified as the sixth sense consciousness. There is sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch, and the sixth is the *gid*. *Gid* is not exactly mind in the sense of *sems*, but it is more mental sensitivity. It is associated with the heart and is a kind of balancing factor which acts as a switchboard in relation to the other five sense consciousnesses. When you see a sight and you hear a sound at the same time, the sight and sound are synchronized to constitute aspects of a single event by the sixth sense. It does a kind of automatic synchronization job, or automatic computerization of the whole process of sense experience. You can see, smell, hear, taste and feel all at the same time and all of those inputs are coherently workable. They make sense to you because of *gid*.

So *gid* is a sort of central-headquarters switchboard, which coordinates our experience into a coherent whole. In some sense it is the most important one of all the three aspects of mind. It is not as intelligent in the sense of manipulation as *sems*. *sems* has something of a political attitude towards one's relationship with

the world; it is somewhat strategy oriented. The sixth sense is more domestic in function. It just tries to maintain the coordination of experience so that all information comes through efficiently, so that there is no problem of being out of communication with anything that is going on. On the other hand *rigpa*, which is the intelligence, the research worker, as it were, in this administration of mind, takes an overall view of one's whole situation. It surveys the relationship between mind and the sixth sense and tries to search out all the possibilities of where things are going wrong, where things might go wrong, where things have gone wrong, how things could be put right. This research worker does not have the power actually to take action on the level of external relations. It is more like an advisor to the state department.

These three principles of *sems*, *rigpa* and *yid* are the most important for us to be aware of at this point. Many other aspects of mind are described in the traditional literature, but these three will suffice for our present understanding.

We should consider this understanding not so much as something that we have been told and therefore we should believe in. The experience described here can actually be felt personally. It can be worked on, related to. A certain part of our experience is organized by our basic mind, a certain part by our sixth sense, and a certain part by our intelligence. In order to understand the basic functions of mindfulness-awareness practice, I think it is very important for us to understand and realize these complexities of our mind.

What we usually do when we get hassled while meditating and feel we cannot sit anymore is to put all of these aspects of mind into one bag and blame our frustration on "this thing." We are frustrated, we feel completely wretched; we feel there are no alternatives and are just sorry for ourselves. Or else we look for alternatives: we go to the movies or buy chewing gum or whatever. But somehow life is not as simple as that. It is not as simple as thinking that "this thing," taken as a lump, is a bad thing; nor can we get away from the basic hassle by going to the movies or buying chewing gum. What is necessary is to make friends with ourselves, to work openly with our basic situation.

There is a gigantic world of mind that exists to which we are almost totally unexposed. This whole world—this tent and this microphone, this light, this grass, the very pair of spectacles that we are wearing—is made by our mind. Everybody's mind made this up, put these things together. Every bolt and nut was put in by somebody-or-other's mind. This whole world is mind's world, the product of mind. This is needless to say; I am sure everybody knows this. But we might remind ourselves of it so that we realize that meditation is not an exclusive activity which means forgetting this world and getting into something else. By meditating, we are dealing with that very mind that devised our eyeglasses and put the lenses in the rims, and that very mind that put up this tent. Our coming here is the product of our mind. Each of us has different mental manifestations which permit others to identify us and say, "This guy is named so-and-so, this girl is named so-and-so." We can

be identified as individuals because we have different mental approaches, which also shape the expressions of our physical features. Our physical characteristics are a part of our mental activity as well. So this is a living world, mind's world. Realizing this, working with mind is no longer a remote or mysterious thing to do. It is no longer dealing with something that is hidden or somewhere else. Mind is right here. Mind is hanging out in the world. It is an open secret.

The method for beginning to relate directly with mind, taught by Lord Buddha and in use for the past 2,500 years, is the practice of mindfulness. There are four aspects to this practice, traditionally known as the four foundations of mindfulness.

Mindfulness of Body

The first foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of body. The practice of mindfulness of body is connected with the need for a sense of being, a sense of groundedness.

To begin with, there is some problem about what we understand by "body." We have a body. We sit on chairs or on the ground; we eat; we sleep; we wear clothes. But the body that we relate with in going through these activities is questionable. Is it the unconditional body, free from any conceptualizations; or is it a body constituted by conceptualizations? According to the tradition, the body we have is what is known as the "mind-body" or psychosomatic body. It is largely based on projections and concepts of body. This mind-body contrasts with the enlightened person's sense of body, which might be called "body-body." This is just simple and straightforward. There is a direct relationship with the earth. As for us, we do not actually have a relationship with the earth. We have some relationship with our body, but it is very uncertain and erratic. We flicker back and forth between body and something else—fantasies, ideas. That seems to be our basic situation.

Even though the psychosomatic body is constituted by projections of body, it can be quite a solid one in terms of those projections. We have expectations concerning the existence of our body, therefore we have to refuel it, entertain it, wash it. What we are involved in with this psychosomatic body is a sense of being. For instance, at this moment you feel that you are sitting on the ground. You have your sense of being in terms of your body resting on the ground. Your buttocks are resting on the earth, therefore you can extend your legs and lean back a little so you have less strain on your body. You have some sense of relaxation as opposed to how it would be if everybody was standing or if just you were standing—standing on your feet, standing on your toes or standing on your

palms. In contrast to these postures, this posture that you are adopting at the moment seems to be an agreeable one, in fact it is one of the most congenial postures that one could ever think of. So being in this posture you can relax and listen, listen to something other than the demands of your body.

Sitting down now, you feel somewhat settled. On the other hand, if the ground was very damp, for instance, you would not feel so settled. Then you would begin to perch on the ground, like a bird on a branch. This is another matter altogether. If you are intensely concerned with some event about to happen, if you are worried about some encounter you are about to have—if you are being interviewed for a job by some executive, for example—you don't really sit on your chair, you perch on it. Perching happens when some demand is being made on you and you feel less of your body and more of your tension and nervousness. It involves a very different sense of body and of being than just sitting as you are doing now.

Right now you are sitting on the ground and you are so completely sitting down that you have been able to shift gears from that and turn on your tape recorders and even start taking notes. You do not regard that as doing two things at once, but you sit there, you have totally flopped, so to speak, and having done that you can turn to your other perceptions—listening, looking and so on. A body situation of having settled and so being able to turn to something else is involved.

But that process of your sitting here at this point is not actually very much a matter of your body *per se* sitting on the ground, but far more a matter of your psychosomatic body sitting on the ground. Somehow sitting on the ground here gives you an idea—particularly all facing in one direction, towards the speaker; and being underneath the roof of the tent; being attracted to the light that is focused on the stage—all this creates a certain style of participation, which is the condition of your psychosomatic body. You are somewhat involved in sitting *per se*, but at the same time you are not. Mind is doing it, concept is doing it. Your mind is shaping the situation in accordance with your body. Your mind is sitting on the ground. Your mind is taking notes. Your mind is wearing glasses. Your mind has such-and-such a hairdo; your mind is wearing such-and-such clothes. Everyone is creating a portrait of themselves. The body exists; therefore mind activity takes place and creates the world according to the body situation, but largely out of contact with it. That is the psychosomatic process.

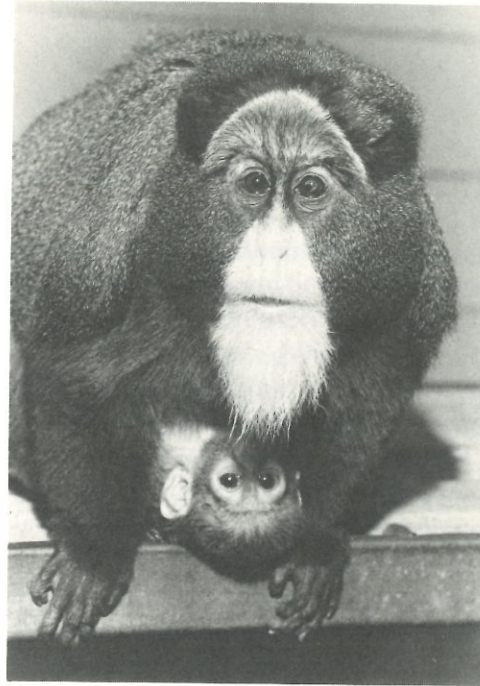
Mindfulness of body brings this all-pervasive mind-imitating-body activity into the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation has to take into account the mind continually shaping itself into *bodylike* attitudes. Consequently, since the time of Buddha, sitting meditation has been recommended and practiced and it has proved to be the best way of dealing with this situation. The basic technique that goes with sitting meditation is working with the breath. You identify with the breath, particularly with the outbreath. The inbreath

is just a gap, a space. During the inbreath you just wait. So you breathe out and then you dissolve and then there is a gap. Breathe out . . . dissolve . . . gap. An openness, an expansion can take place constantly that way.

Mindfulness plays a very important role in this technique. Mindfulness, in this case, means that when you sit and meditate, you actually do sit. You actually do sit as far as the psychosomatic body is concerned. You feel the ground, body, breath, temperature. You don't try specifically to watch and keep track of what is going on. You don't try to formalize the sitting situation and make it into some special activity that you are performing. You just do sit. And then you begin to feel that there is some sense of groundedness. This is not particularly a product of being deliberate, but is more the force of the actual fact of being there. So you sit. And you sit. And you breathe. And you sit and you breathe. Sometimes you think, but still you are thinking sitting thoughts. The psychosomatic body is sitting, so your thoughts have a flat bottom.

You go on and on sitting. And then somehow you have a sense, a feeling, that you have done something. That is one of the most important characteristics of mindfulness—that you feel you are actually doing something. In this case you feel that you are taking part in some particular experience or project that has a flat bottom. It is not ball-like, it does not have wings, but psychosomatically it actually has a flat bottom.

That mindfulness of body is connected with the earth. It is an openness which has a base, a foundation. A quality of expansive awareness develops through mindfulness of body,



a sense of being settled and therefore being able to afford to open out.

Going along with this mindfulness requires a great deal of trust. Probably the beginning meditator will not be able simply to rest there, but will feel the need for a change. I remember someone who had just finished a retreat telling me how she sat and felt her body and felt grounded. But then she thought immediately how she should be doing something else. And she went on to tell me how the right book “just jumped in my lap” and she started to read. At that point you don’t have a solid base anymore. Your mind is beginning to grow little wings. The mindfulness of body has to do with trying to remain human, rather than becoming animals or flies or etheric beings. It means just trying to remain a human being, an ordinary human being.

The basic starting point for this is this solidness, groundedness. When you sit, you actually sit. Even your floating thoughts begin to sit on their own bottoms. There are no particular problems. You have a sense of solidness, groundedness and, at the same time, a sense of being.

Without this particular foundation of mindfulness, the rest of your meditation practice could be very airy-fairy—vacillating back and forth, trying this and trying that. You could be constantly tiptoeing the surface of the universe, not actually getting a foothold anywhere. You could become an eternal hitchhiker. So with this first technique you develop some basic solidness. In the mindfulness of body, there is a sense of finding some home ground.

Mindfulness of Life

The application of mindfulness has to be precise. If we cling to our practice, that creates fundamental stagnation. Therefore, in our application of the techniques of mindfulness, we must be aware of the fundamental tendency to cling, to survive. We come to this in the second foundation of mindfulness, which is the mindfulness of survival or life. Since we are dealing with the context of meditation, we encounter this tendency in the form of clinging to the meditative state. We experience the meditative state and it is momentarily tangible, but in the same moment we experience it, it is dissolving. Going along with this process means developing a sense of letting go of awareness as well as of contacting it. This is the basic technique of this second foundation of mindfulness, which could be described as "touch and go." You are there—present, mindful—and then you let go.

The general misunderstanding that exists is that the meditative state of mind has to be captured and then nursed and cherished. That is definitely the wrong approach. If you try to domesticate your mind through meditation, try to possess it by holding onto the meditative state, the clear result will be regression on the path, a loss of freshness and spontaneity. If you try to hold on without lapse all the time, then maintaining your awareness begins to become a domestic hassle. It becomes like painfully going through housework. There will be an underlying sense of resentment and the practice of meditation will become confusing. You will begin to develop a love-hate relationship towards your practice, in which your concept of it seems good, but, at the same time, the demand this rigid concept makes on you is too painful.

So the technique of the mindfulness of life is based on "touch and go." The awareness or the object of awareness is developed and you focus your attention on it. But then, in the same moment, you disown it and go on. What is needed here is some sense of confidence, confidence that you do not have to securely own your mind, but can tune into its process spontaneously.

Mindfulness of life relates to the clinging tendency not only in connection with the meditative state, but, even more importantly, on the raw level of anxiety about survival that manifests in us constantly, second by second, minute by minute. You breathe for survival, you lead life for survival. The feeling is constantly present that you are trying to protect yourself from death. For the practical purposes of the second foundation, instead of regarding this survival mentality as something negative, instead of relating to it

as ego-clinging as is done in the abstract philosophical overview of Buddhism, this particular practice switches the logic around. In the second foundation, the survival struggle is regarded as a steppingstone in the practice of meditation. Whenever you have the sense of the survival instinct functioning, that can be transmuted into a sense of being, a sense of having already survived. Mindfulness becomes a basic acknowledgement of existing. This does not have the flavor of "Thank God, I have survived." Instead, it is more an objective, impartial "I am alive, I am here, sobeit."

At this point, meditation becomes an actual part of life, rather than just a practice or exercise. It becomes inseparable from the instinct to live that accompanies all our experience. That instinct to live can be seen as containing awareness, meditation, mindfulness. It constantly tunes us in to what is happening. So the life force that keeps us alive and that manifests itself continually in our stream of consciousness, itself becomes the practice of mindfulness. Such mindfulness brings clarity, skill and intelligence. Experience is brought from the framework of intense psychosomatic confusion into that of the real body, because we are simply tuning into what is *already* happening instead of projecting anything further.

Since mindfulness is part of our stream of consciousness, the practice of meditation cannot be regarded as something alien, an emulation of some picturesque yogi who has a fixation on meditating all the time. Seen from the point of view of the mindfulness of life, meditation is the total experience of any living being who has the instinct to survive. Therefore, meditating, developing mindfulness, should not be regarded as a minority-group activity or some specialized, eccentric pursuit. It is a wide-world approach which relates to all experience—it is tuning into life.

Frequently people undertake the practice of meditation with a sense of purity or austerity. They somehow feel that by meditating they are doing the right thing and they feel like good boys and good girls. Not only are they doing the right thing, but they are also getting away from the ugly world. They are becoming pure; they are renouncing the world and becoming like the great yogis of the past. They don't actually live and meditate in caves but they can regard the corner of the room that they have arranged for meditation as a cave. They can close their eyes and feel that they are meditating in a cave in the mountains. That kind of imagination makes them feel rather good. It feels fitting; it feels clean and secure.

There is this strong tendency to isolate the practice of meditation from our actual living situation. We build up all kinds of extraneous concepts and images about it. It is satisfying to regard meditation as austere and

above life. But mindfulness of life steers us in just the opposite direction. The approach of mindfulness of life is that if you are meditating in a room, you are meditating in a room. You don't regard the room as a cave. If you are breathing, you are breathing, rather than convincing yourself you are a motionless rock. You keep your eyes open and simply let yourself be where you are. There are no imaginations involved with this approach. You just go through with your situation as it is. If your meditation place is in a rich setting, just be in the midst of it. If it is in a simple setting, just be in the midst of that. You are not trying to get away from anywhere to anywhere else. You are tuning in simply and directly to your process of life. This practice is the essence of here and now.

You do not tune in as part of trying to live further. You do not approach mindfulness as a further elaboration of the survival instinct. Rather you just see the sense of survival as it is taking place in you already. You are here; you are living; let it be that way—that is mindfulness. Your heart pulsates and you breathe. All kinds of things are happening at once in you. Let mindfulness work with that, let that be mindfulness, let every beat of your heart be mindfulness itself, let every breath. You do not have to breathe specially; your breath *is* an expression of mindfulness. If you approach meditation in this way, it becomes very personal and very direct.

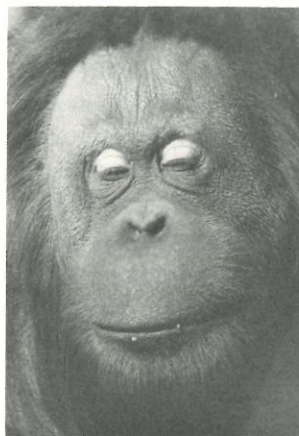
Having such an outlook and such a relationship with the practice of meditation brings enormous strength, enormous energy and power. But this only comes if your relation to the present situation is accurate. Otherwise there is no strength because you are apart from the energy of that situation. The accuracy of mindfulness, on the other hand, brings not only strength, but a sense of dignity and delight. This is simply because you are doing something that is applicable that very moment. And you are doing it without any implications or motives. It is direct and right on the point.

But, again it is necessary to say, once you have that experience of the presence of life, don't hang onto it. Just touch and go. Touch that presence of life being lived, then go. You do not have to ignore it. "Go" does not mean that you have to turn your back on the experience and shut yourself off from it, it means just to be in it without further analysis and without further reinforcement. Holding onto life, or trying to reassure yourself that it is so, has the sense of death rather than life. It is only because you have that sense of death that you want to make sure that you are alive. You would like to have an insurance policy. But if you feel that you are alive, that is good enough. You do not have to make sure that you actually do breathe, that you actually can be seen. You do not have to check up to be sure you have a shadow. Just living is enough without reassuring yourself that you are living. If you don't stop to make sure, living becomes very clearcut, very alive and very precise.

So mindfulness here does not mean pushing yourself to anything or hanging onto anything. It means allowing yourself to be there in the very moment of what is happening in your living process and then letting go.

Mindfulness of Effort

The next foundation of mindfulness is mindfulness of effort. The idea of effort is apparently problematical. Effort would seem to be at odds with the sense of being that arises from mindfulness of body. Also pushing of any kind does not have an obvious place in the touch-and-go technique of the mindfulness of life. In either case, deliberate, heavyhanded



effort would seem to endanger the open precision of the process of mindfulness. Still we cannot expect proper mindfulness to develop without any exertion on our part. Effort is necessary. But in order to develop some notion of right effort, we have to first consider what we mean by effort.

One kind of effort is purely oriented towards the achievement of a result. There is a sense of struggle and pushing, egged on by the sense of a goal. Such an effort picks up momentum and begins to thrive on its own speed. This is effort in the manner of the run

of a roadrunner. Another approach to effort is fraught with a sense of tremendous meaningfulness. There is no sense of uplift or inspiration in the work. Instead there is a strong feeling of being dutiful. You just slog along, slowly and surely, trying to chew through your obligations in the manner of a worm in a tree.

Neither of these kinds of effort have a sense of openness or precision. The traditional Buddhist analogy for right effort is the walk of an elephant or tortoise. The elephant or tortoise moves along surely, unstopably, with great dignity. Like the worm, it is not excitable. But the worm just bites whatever comes in front of its mouth and chews through. The channel that its belly passes through is its total space. The tortoise or elephant has a panoramic view of the ground it is treading. Though it is serious and slow, because of its ability to survey the ground, there is a sense of playfulness and intelligence in its movement.

In the case of meditation, trying to develop an inspiration that will cause us to forget our pain and make our practice thrive on a sense of continual accomplishment is quite immature. On the other hand, too much solemnity and dutifulness creates a lifeless and narrow outlook and a stale psychological environment. The style of right effort, as taught by Buddha, is serious but not too serious. It takes advantage of the natural flow of instinct to bring the wandering mind constantly back to the mindfulness of breathing.

The crucial point in the bringing-back process is that it is not necessary to go through deliberate stages of preparing to do it, then getting a hold on our attention and then dragging it back to the breathing as if we were trying to drag a naughty child back from doing something terrible. It is not a question of forcing the mind back to some particular object, but of bringing it back down from the dreamworld into reality. You are breathing, you are sitting. That is what you are doing and you should be doing that completely, fully, wholeheartedly.

There is a kind of technique or trick here that is extremely effective and extremely useful, not only for sitting meditation, but also in daily life, for meditation in action. The way of coming back is through what we might call the "abstract watcher." This watcher is just simple self-consciousness, without aim or goal. When we encounter anything, the first flash which takes place is the bare sense of duality, separateness. On that basis, we begin to evaluate, pick and choose, make decisions, execute our will. The abstract watcher is just the basic sense of separateness, just plain cognition of being there before any of the rest develops. Instead of condemning this self-consciousness as dualistic, we take advantage of this tendency in our psychological system as the basis of the mindfulness of effort. The experience is just a sudden flash of the watcher's being *there*. At that point we don't think, "I must get back to the breath," or "I must try and get away from these thoughts." We don't have to entertain a deliberate and logical movement of mind which repeats to itself the purpose of sitting practice. There is just suddenly a general sense that something is

happening here and now, and we are brought back. Abruptly, immediately, without a name, without the application of any kind of concept, we have a quick glimpse of changing the tone. That is the core of the mindfulness-of-effort practice.

One of the reasons that ordinary effort becomes so dreary and stagnant is that our intention always develops a verbalization. Subconsciously, we actually verbalize: "I must go and help so-and-so because it is half-past one." Or, "This is a good thing for me to do; it is good for me to perform this duty." Any kind of sense of duty we might have is always verbalized, though the speed of conceptual mind is so great we may not even notice the verbalization. Still the contents of the verbalization are clearly felt. This verbalization pins the effort to a fixed frame of reference, which makes it extremely tiresome. In contrast, this abstract effort we are talking about flashes in a fraction of a second, without any name or any idea with it. It is just a jerk, a sudden change of course that does not define its destination. The rest of the effort is just like a tortoise's walk, step-by-step, going slowly, observing the situation around us.

You could call this abstract self-consciousness "leap" if you like, or "jerk" or "sudden reminder"; or you could call it "amazement." Sometimes it could also be felt as panic, unconditioned panic, because of the change of course—something comes to us and changes our whole course. If we work with this sudden jerk, and do so with no effort in the effort, then effort becomes self-existing. It stands on its own two feet, so to speak, rather than needing another effort to trigger it off. If the latter were the case, effort would have to be deliberately manufactured, which runs counter to the whole sense of meditation. Then, once you have had that sudden instant of mindfulness, the idea is not to try to maintain it. You should not hold onto it or try to cultivate it. Don't entertain the messenger. Don't nurse the reminder. Get back to meditation. Get into the message.

This kind of effort is extremely important. That sudden flash is a key to all Buddhist meditation, from the level of basic mindfulness to the highest levels of tantra. Such mindfulness of effort could definitely be considered the most important aspect of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness of body creates the general setting; it brings meditation into the psychosomatic set-up of our life. Mindfulness of life makes meditation practice personal and intimate. Mindfulness of effort makes meditation workable. It connects the foundations of mindfulness to the path, to the spiritual journey. It is like the wheel of a chariot, which makes the connection between the chariot and the road, or like the oar of a boat. It actualizes the practice, makes it move, proceed.

But we have a problem here. Mindfulness of effort cannot be deliberately manufactured. On the other hand, it is not enough just to hope that a flash will come to us and we will be reminded. We cannot just leave it up to "that thing" to happen to us. We have to set some kind of general alarm system, so to speak, or prepare a general atmosphere. There must be a

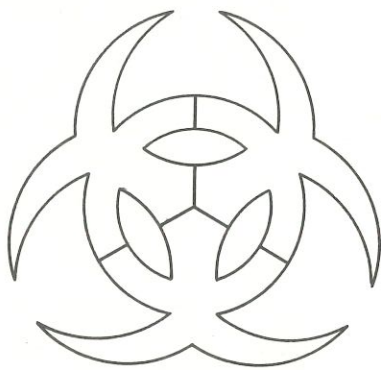
background of discipline which sets the tone of the sitting practice. Effort is important on this level also, effort in the sense of not having the faintest indulgence towards any form of entertainment. We have to give something up. Unless we give up our reservations about taking the practice seriously, it is virtually impossible to have that kind of instantaneous effort dawn on us. So it is extremely important to have respect for the practice, a sense of appreciation, a willingness to work hard.

Once we do have a sense of commitment to relating with things as they actually are, that opens the way to the flash which reminds us—*that, that, that*. "That what?" does not apply any more. Just *that*, which triggers an entirely new state of consciousness, which brings us back automatically to mindfulness of breathing or a general sense of being.

We work hard not being diverted into entertainment. Still in some sense we can enjoy the very boring situation of the practice of sitting meditation. We can actually appreciate not having lavish resources of entertainment available. Because of having already included our boredom and ennui, we have nothing to run away from and we feel completely secure and grounded.

This basic sense of appreciation is another aspect of the background that makes it possible for the spontaneous flash of the reminder to occur more easily. This is said to be like falling in love. When we are in love with someone, somehow or other, because our whole attitude is open toward that person, we get a very sudden flash—not of the person by name or a concept of what the person looks like—those are afterthoughts. We get an abstract flash of our lover being *that*. A flash of *that* comes into our mind first. Then we might ponder on it, elaborate it, enjoy our daydreams about it. But all this happens afterwards. The flash is primeval.

Openness always brings that kind of result. Another traditional analogy that has been used is that of the hunter. The hunter does not have to think of a stag or a mountain goat or a bear or any specific animal, but he is looking for *that*. When he walks and hears some sound, senses some subtle possibility, he does not think of what animal he is going to find, just the feeling of *that* comes up. Anybody in any kind of complete involvement, on the hunter's level, the lover's level, or the meditator's level, has that kind of openness which brings about sudden flashes, an almost magical sensation of thatness, without a name, without concept, without idea. This is the instant of effort, concentrated effort, and awareness follows after that. Having disowned that sudden experience, awareness comes very slowly and settles back to the earthy reality of just being there.



Mindfulness of Mind

Often mindfulness is referred to as watchfulness. But that should not give the impression that mindfulness means watching something happening. Mindfulness means being watchful, rather than watching something. This implies a process of intelligent alertness, rather than the mechanical business of simply observing what happens. Particularly the fourth foundation, which is mindfulness of mind, has qualities of an aroused intelligence operating. The intelligence of the fourth foundation is a sense of lighthandedness. If you open the windows and doors of a room the right amount, you can maintain the interior feeling of the roomness and, at the same time, have the freshness from outside. Mindfulness of mind brings that same kind of intelligent balance.

Without mind and its conflicts, we cannot meditate or develop balance, or develop anything at all for that matter. Therefore, conflicts that arise from mind are regarded as a necessary part of the process of mindfulness. But at the same time, those conflicts have to be controlled, enough so that we can come back to our mindfulness of breathing. A balance has to be maintained. There has to be a certain discipline so that we are neither totally lost in daydream, nor missing the freshness and openness that comes from not holding our attention too tightly. This balance is the state of wakefulness, mindfulness.

People with different temperaments bring different approaches to the practice of meditation. Some people are extremely orthodox, in fact dictatorial, with themselves. Other people are extraordinarily loose. They just, so to speak, hang out in the meditation posture and let everything happen. Other people struggle back and forth between those two extremes, not knowing

exactly what to do. How one approaches the sitting situation will depend on different moods and different types of people, obviously. But always a certain sense of accuracy is required, and a certain sense of freedom is required.

The meaning of mindfulness of mind is being with your mind. When you sit and meditate, you are there, you are being with your mind. You are being with your body, with your sense of life or survival, with your sense of effort. And at the same time you are being with your mind. You are being there. Mindfulness of mind suggests a sense of presence and a sense of accuracy in terms of being there. You are there, therefore you can't miss yourself. If you are not there, then you might miss yourself. But that also would be a doubletake: If you realize you are not there, that means you are there. That brings you back to where you are. Back to square one.

The whole process is very simple, actually. Unfortunately, explaining the simplicity takes a lot of vocabulary, a lot of grammar, and yards and yards of recording tape. However, it is a very simple matter. And that matter concerns you and your world. Nothing else. It does not particularly concern enlightenment and does not particularly concern metaphysical comprehension. In fact, this simple matter does not particularly concern the next minute, or the minute before. It only concerns the very small area where you are.

Really we operate on a very small basis. We think we are great, broadly significant, and that we cover a whole large area. We see ourselves as having a history and a future, and here we are in our "big deal" present. But if we look at ourselves clearly this very moment, we see we are just a grain of sand, just little people concerned only with this little dot that exists which is called "nowness."



We can only operate on one dot at a time and mindfulness of mind approaches our experience in that way. You are there and you approach yourself on the very simple basis of *that*. "That" does not particularly have many dimensions, many perspectives. It is just a simple thing. Relating directly to this little dot of *nowness* is the right understanding of austerity. And if we work on this basis, it is possible to begin to see the truth of the matter, so to speak; to begin to see what *nowness* really means.

This experience is very revealing in that it is very personal. This does not mean personal in the sense of petty and mean. The idea is that this experience is your experience. You might be tempted to share it with somebody else, but then it becomes their experience, rather than what you wished for—your-their experience jumbled together. You can never do that. People have different experiences of reality, which cannot be jumbled together. Invaders and dictators of all kinds have tried to make others have their experience, to make a big concoction of minds controlled by one person. That is impossible. Everyone has failed in making that kind of spiritual pizza. So you have to accept that your experience is personal. This personal experience of *nowness* is very much there and very obviously there. You cannot even throw it away!

In sitting practice or in the awareness practice of everyday life, for that matter, you are not trying to solve a wide array of problems. You are looking at one situation which is very limited. It is so limited that there is even no room to be claustrophobic. If it is not there, it is not there. You missed it. If it is there, it is there. That is the pinpoint of mindfulness of mind, that simplicity of total up-to-dateness, total directness. Mind functions singly. Once. And once. One thing at a time. The practice of mindfulness of mind is to be there with that one-shot perception, constantly. You get a complete picture from which nothing is missing: that is happening, now that is happening, now that is happening. There is no escape. Even if you focus yourself on escaping, that is also a one-shot movement of which you could be mindful. You can be mindful of your escape—of your sexual fantasy or your aggression fantasy.

One thing at a time happens always—in a direct, simple movement of mind. Therefore traditionally in the technique for mindfulness of mind, it is recommended that you be aware of each single-shot perception as mind as thinking, "I am thinking I hear a sound. I am thinking I smell a scent. I am thinking I feel hot. I am thinking I feel cold." Each one of these is a total approach to experience—very precise, very direct—one single movement of mind. Things always happen in that direct way.

Often we tend to think that we are very clever and can get away from that direct nature of things. We feel we can get around that choiceless simplicity by approaching something from the back door, or from above, from the loft. We feel that way we can prove ourselves extremely intelligent and resourceful. We are cunning and shifty. But somehow it does not

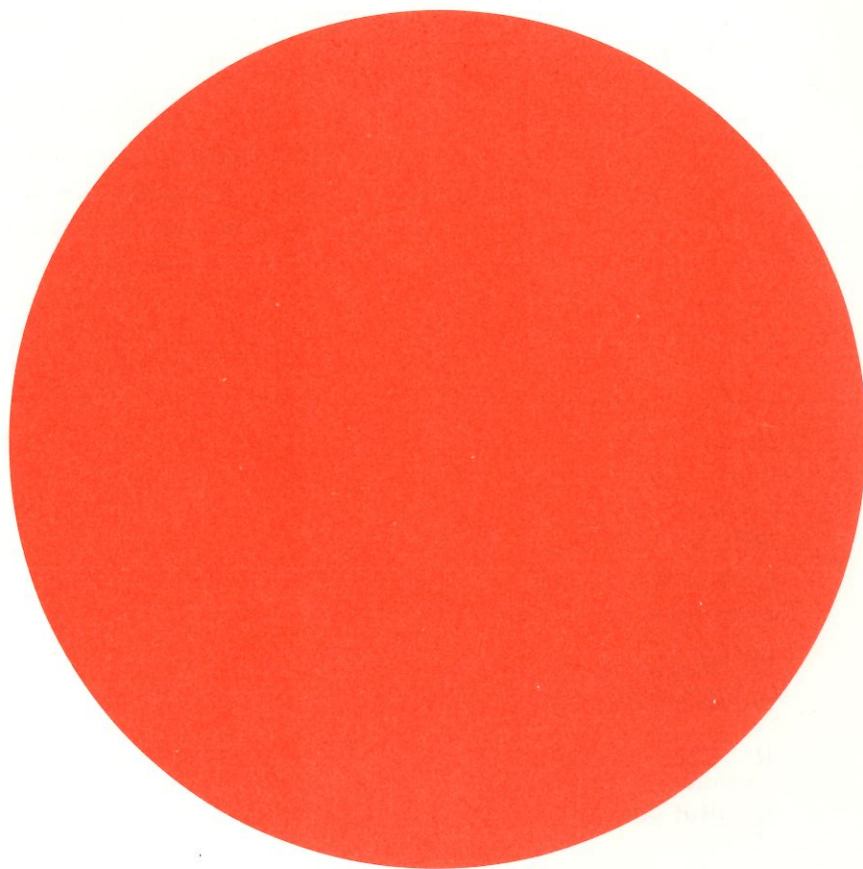
work. When we think we are approaching something from the backdoor, we do so under the illusion that there is *something else* to approach. But at that moment there is only the backdooriness. That one-shot backdooriness is the totality of what is. We are the backdoor. If we are approaching from the loft downwards, you, me, everybody, all of us are up there. The whole thing is up there, rather than there being something else for us to go down and invade and control. There isn't anything else at all. It is a one-shot deal. That one-shot reality is all there is. Obviously we can make up an illusion. We can imagine that we are conquering the universe by multiplying ourself into hundreds of aspects and personalities, the conquering and the conquered. But that is like the dream state of someone who is actually asleep. There is only the one shot; everything happens only once. There is just that. Therefore mindfulness of mind is applicable.

So meditation practice has to be approached in a very simple and very basic way. That seems to be the only way that can apply to our experience of what we actually are. That way, we do not get into the illusion that we can function as a hundred people at once. When we lose the simplicity we begin to be concerned about ourselves. "While I'm doing this, such-and-such is going to happen. What shall I do?" Thinking that more than *that* is happening, we get involved in hope and fear in relation to all kinds of things that are not actually happening. Really it does not work that way. While we are doing *that*, we are doing that. If something else happens, we are doing something else. But two things could not happen at once. It is easy to imagine that two things are happening at once, because our journey back and forth between the two may be very speedy. But even then we are doing only one thing at a time. We are jumping-back and forth, rather than being in two places at once, which is impossible.

The idea of mindfulness of mind is to slow down that fickleness of jumping back and forth. We have to realize that we are not extraordinary mental acrobats. We are not all that well trained. And even an extraordinarily well trained mind could not manage that many things at once, even not two. But because things are very simple and direct, we can focus, be aware, be mindful of one thing at a time. That one-pointedness, that bare attention seems to be the basic point.

It is necessary to take that logic all the way and realize that even bare attention to what we are doing is impossible. If you have bare attention to what you are doing, you have two personalities. One personality is bare attention, the other personality is doing things. Real bare attention is being there all at once. You do not have bare attention *to* what you are doing; you are not mindful *of* what you are doing. That is impossible. Mindfulness is the act as well as the experience happening at the same time. Obviously, you could have an attitude at the beginning, before you get into real mindfulness, that you are willing to be mindful, willing to surrender, willing to discipline yourself, and that would be somewhat

dualistic. But then you do the thing, you just do it. It is like the famous Zen saying, "When I eat, I eat; when I sleep, I sleep." You just do it, with absolutely no implication behind what you are doing, not even of mindfulness. When you begin to feel implications of mindfulness, then you are beginning to split yourself. Then you are faced with your resistance, and hundreds of other things begin seemingly to attack you, to bother you. Trying to be mindful by deliberately looking at yourself involves too much watcher. Then you have lost the one-shot simplicity.



Questions and Answers

Question: I don't understand how *sems* works.

Rinpoche: As we have said, *sems* is the equivalent of "mind." But instead of using the word "mind" as a noun, it might be more helpful to think of it as a verb, as in "minding" or "mind your business." *Sems* is an active process, because you cannot have mind without an object of mind. Mind and its object are one process. Mind only functions in relation to a reference point. In other words, you cannot see anything in the dark. The function of sight is to see something that is not darkness, an object, to see in the light. In the same way, the function of mind is to have a reference point, a relative reference point which survives the mind, the minding process. That is happening right now, actually, everywhere.

Q: I was wondering if you could speak a little more about how mind or minding creates the world. Are you talking about creating in the sense that if we are not mindful of the world the world does not exist? I feel you're saying something else besides that.

R: Well, mind is very simple perception—it can only survive on "other." Otherwise it starves to death.

Q: You mean the mind can only exist on things outside of itself?

R: That is right. But there is also the possibility that mind can go too far in that direction. Mind cannot exist on itself alone without the projection of a relative reference point. On the other hand, mind also cannot exist if it is too crowded with projections. That way it also loses its reference point. So mind has to maintain a certain balance. To begin with, mind looks for a way to secure its survival. It looks for a mate, a friend; it creates the world. But when it begins to get too much—too many connections, too much world—it rejects it; it creates a little niche somewhere or other and fights for that tooth and nail in order to survive. Sometimes mind loses the game. And then mind ceases to be mind. It becomes psychotic, completely mad. You "lose your mind," as we say. You are completely overcrowded by the whole projection of the world. You cannot even function on an ordinary logical level. Such psychosis results from either of the two extremes: overcrowdedness, or, on the other hand, lack of anything for mind to work with. So mind can only exist in the neurosis of relative reference, not in psychosis. When it reaches the psychotic level, mind ceases to function as mind. It becomes something else, something poisonous.

Q: According to that model, how would meditation practice affect the relationship between mind and the world it's in battle with?

R: The purpose of meditation practice is to try to save oneself from the psychosis.

Q: But you still maintain the world? I mean you still maintain the neurotic state, basically?

R: Not necessarily, either. There is another alternative mind which does not need the neurotic world. This is where the idea of enlightenment comes in. Enlightened mind can go further and further, beyond questions of relative reference. It does not have to keep up with this world. It reaches a point where it does not have to sharpen itself on this neurotic world any more. There is another level of experience which still has reference point but in a much clearer way. In this case it is reference point without demand, reference point that does not need further reference point. That is called nonduality. The possibility does exist of developing a higher level of duality which does not involve the dualistic approach as such; and this is called nonduality. This does not mean to say that you dissolve into the world or the world becomes you. It's not a question of oneness but rather a question of zeroness.

Q: Rinpoche, how does the notion of mind that you've talked about relate to the notion of ego and the strategies of maintaining ego?

R: Mind, as we have been talking about it, is ego. Ego can survive only in relation to a reference point, not by itself. But I am trying to make the whole thing quite simple and relate it directly to the practice of meditation. If we think practicing meditation is concerned with working with our ego, that sounds like too big a deal. Whereas if we just work with mind, that is an actual, real thing to us. In order to wake up in the morning you have to know it is morning—there is light outside and you have awakened. Those simple things are a perfect example of basic ego. Ego survives and thrives on reference point. So *sems* is ego, yes.

Q: You talked about the mind relating to externals only. What do you consider it when the mind is functioning in pure intellection or imagination, creating its own object, so to speak.

R: That is external.

Q: But there could be nothing out there. You could be in a darkened cell and be imagining hearing a symphony, for example, and it exists only in your mind.

R: Sure. That is outside. That seems to be the point. Maybe you are not really talking to me now. Maybe you are in a dark room and you are talking to your version of me. Somehow the physical visual situation is not that important a factor. Any mental object, mental content, is regarded as an external thing.

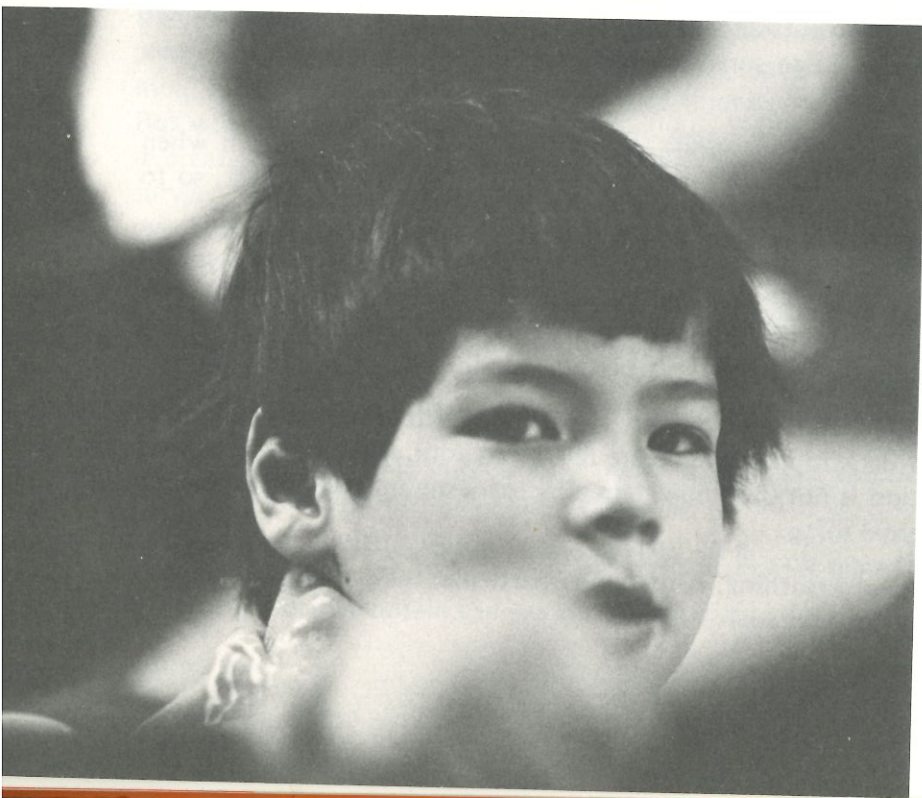
Q: In regard to the technique of breathing, is there any particular reason why we identify with the outbreath rather than the inbreath?

R: That's a question of openness. You have to create some kind of gap, some area where there is less strain. Once you breathe out, you're sure to breathe in again, so there's room for relief of some kind. Nothing needs watching there.

Another thing is that outbreathing is an expression of stepping out of your centralized system. Outbreathing has nothing to do with centralizing in your body, where usually everything is psychosomatically bottled up. Instead, by identifying with the outbreath you are sharing, you are giving something out.

Q: When you were talking about the "flat-bottomed" ideas, you said something like having that flat bottom is what provides an openness or a space, as opposed to having wings on your mind, flying thoughts or whatever. What makes that panic arise that made the retreatant turn to the book and that makes us run away from that sense of groundedness?

R: A lot of fear comes when things are too clearly defined for you. The situation becomes overwhelmingly sharp and direct and accurate, so that you would rather interpret it than simply acknowledge it. It is like when you say something very plain and direct to someone and you find him saying, "In other words, you are saying, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Instead of relating directly to what has been said, there is a tendency to try to keep your twist. That seems to be a problem of shyness from the bluntness of reality, being shy of that formness, that thingness that exists in our world that nobody faces. Facing



that is the highest form of sanity and enlightened vision. This seems to be the basic point of certain descriptions in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, where it talks about a bright light coming towards you that you shy away from; you are frightened of it. Then there is a dull, seductive light coming from one of the six realms of neurotic existence and you are attracted instead to that. You prefer the shadow to the reality. That is the kind of problem that exists. Often the reality is so blunt and outrageous and overwhelming that you feel facing it would be like sitting on a razorblade.

Q: You have spoken of experiencing the body. There are a lot of techniques, practices for feeling the body, where attention will be focused on the physical sensation or tension or whatever you feel when you attempt to feel the physical body. I'm wondering now what relation that kind of practice would have to the practice with the breath that you described. Are those techniques a different thing or would they reinforce the practice with the breath?

R: Your breath *is* your physical body from the point of view of this approach. There are all kinds of sensations that you experience along with the breath—pains, aches, itches, pleasurable feelings and so on. You experience all those things along with the breath. Breath is the theme and the other things go along with it. So the idea of the breathing technique is simply to be very precise about what you are experiencing. You relate to those sensations as they come up, along with your breath, without imagining that you are experiencing your body. Those experiences are not at all your body's experiences. That is impossible. Actually, you are in no way in a position to experience your body. Those experiences are just thoughts—"I'm thinking I'm in pain." It is the thought of pain, the thought of itch and so forth.

Q: So are you saying that the breathing technique is in a way a saner attitude than believing that "Now I'll feel my body," and making a project out of that?

R: The breathing technique is a literal one, a direct one. It faces what is actually the case rather than just trying to turn out some result.

Q: Before you were saying that when you're sitting here and you're taking notes, or focused on the speaker and relaxing, that's a psychosomatic notion of body. And psychosomatic, the way I understand it, is sort of an imagined thing or something that has to do with your mind, with how your mind is affecting your body. Like a psychosomatic disease—your mind has some effect on your body. How is that related to the fact that you're sitting here relaxing and listening to a speaker? How is that a psychosomatic sense of body?

R: The point is that, whatever we do in our lives, we don't actually just do it, we are affected by mind. Maybe the body, actually the true body, is being pressured by the psychosomatic speed of the mind. You might say that there is a possibility that you might

be sitting here now properly, in a non-psychosomatic way. But still the whole situation of sitting here was brought together, the whole incident was moved into place, by psychosomatic driving force. So your sitting here was set up by the psychosomatic system, basically. If you have some kind of psychosomatic convulsion and you throw up, actually you do throw up stuff, which is not psychosomatic stuff. It is body stuff, but it is manifested in psychosomatic style. Its being thrown up was instigated by psychosomatic process. That is the kind of situation we are in. Fundamentally our whole world is psychosomatic, from that point of view. The whole process of living is composed of psychosomatic hangups. The desire to listen to the teachings comes from beginning to be aware of one's hangups. Since you have begun to be aware of your hangups you would like to create this further hangup to clear up the existing hangups.

Q: Instead of relating directly?

R: Well, one never does that until one has some kind of flashes of something on the level of enlightenment. Until that point everything one does is always by innuendo.

Q: So any kind of disease or anything that's affecting you is psychosomatic?

R: It is not only disease that is psychosomatic. Your process of health is psychosomatic already. Actual disease is sort of an extra thing, like yeast growing on top of your back.

Q: Rinpoche, speaking about "touch and go," if a fantasy arises, to what point do you allow that fantasy to develop before you let go of it?

R: Once it arises, that is already "touch." Then let it be as it is. Then it goes. There is a peak point there. First, there is creation of the fantasy; then it reaches maturity; then it is beyond its prime; and then it slowly vanishes or tries to turn into something else.

Q: Sometimes a fantasy will turn into a whole emotional plot which seems to get more and more complex.

R: That is beating a dead horse. You just let it come, play out its impetus or energy, then just let go. You have to taste it, then let it go. Having tasted it, it is not recommended to manipulate it any further.

Q: When you speak of "touch and go," evidently meditating, sitting practice, is the "touch." Do you mean also there are times when it's inappropriate to be mindful in this manner? That in everyday life we should just let mindfulness go?

R: I think there is some misunderstanding there. "Touch" and "go" always come together. It is like whenever there is a one there is a zero. The number series, starting with one, implies zero. Numbers do not make sense if there is no such thing as zero. "Touch" has no meaning without "go." They are simultaneous. That simultaneity is mindfulness, which happens both during formal sitting practice and the postmeditation experience of everyday life.

Q: Previously, you mentioned the retreatant who had the feeling of sitting on a razorblade when things became very clear, very distinct. Could you relate that experience to the sense of delight in the mindfulness of livelihood?

R: It is the same experience, actually. Whenever there is a threat of death, that also brings a sense of life. It is like taking a pill because if you don't take it you might die. That pill is associated with the threat of death, but you take it with the attitude that it will enable you to live. Facing the moment clearly is like taking that pill. It is the fear of death and love of life simultaneously.

Q: How does mindfulness of life inform ethical behavior, ethical action?

R: Things are done without mindfulness in the samsaric world; we thrive on that. Consequently, almost everything we do is somewhat disjointed; somehow it doesn't click, it doesn't fit. There is something illogical about our whole approach. We might be very reasonable, good people; still, behind the facade we are somewhat off. There is fundamental neurosis taking place all the time on our part, which in turn creates pain for other people as well as ourselves. People get hurt by that and their reactions create more of the same. That is what we call the neurotic world or samsara. Nobody is actually having a good time. Even ostensibly good times are somewhat pushed. And the undercurrent of frustration from sensing that creates further indulgence.

Mindfulness of livelihood is an entirely different approach, in which life is treated as precious, which is to say, in some sense, mindfully. Things are seen in their own right rather than as aspects of the vicious cycle of neurosis. Everything is jointed rather than disjointed. One's state of mind becomes coherent so there is a basic workability concerning how, in a general sense, to conduct one's life. One begins to become literate in reading the style of the world, the pattern of the world. That is the starting point, by no means the final stage. It is just beginning to see how to read the world.

Q: I really cannot imagine what experience would be like without all kinds of imagination and projections. I can't get a sense of participation in the world just as it is, just as things are occurring and coming up.

R: Well, are you interested in finding that out?

Q: I guess so.

R: Well, it is very hard to do. The reason it is hard is that you are doing it. It is like looking for a lost horse. In order to look for it, you need to ride your lost horse. On the other hand, maybe you are riding on your lost horse, but still you are looking for it. It is something like that. It's one of those.

You see, there is really no such thing as ultimate reality. If there was such a thing, for that reason alone that could not be it. That is the problem. So you are back to square one. And the only thing, it seems that you can do is practice. That is good enough.

Q: In connection with the flash of waking up in the mindfulness of effort, I still don't clearly understand where you are supposed to come back from and what you are supposed to come back to.

R: Once the flash happens, you do not have to find out where you came from and appreciate it. That is what I mean about not entertaining the messenger. You also do not need an idea of where you are going. After the flash, your awareness is like a snowflake released from the clouds. It is going to settle down to the ground anyhow. You have no choice.

Q: Sometimes being mindful of the exhalation seems to become too deliberate. It seems too much that the watcher is doing it from above, rather than the breathing and the mindfulness being simultaneous.

R: The touch-and-go approach is applicable here. You touch the exhalation and then disown the awareness even of that. If you are trying to have bare attention constantly, then you have a problem of being very rigid and dragging yourself along. So you touch with the breath and go with the breath. That way there is a sense of freshness, a change of air. It is like a pulsation; or like listening to a musical beat. While you are trying to keep with one

beat, you miss another. But that way you begin to hear the rhythm; and then you hear the entirety of the music, too. It is the same way with any experience. Another example is eating food. When we eat food, we don't taste it constantly, just now and then. We hover around our interest. Always we just touch the highlights of our interest. So the touch-and-go style of mindfulness practice is borrowed from the basic style of mind. If you go along with that, then there is no problem at all.

Q: I somewhat understand how mindfulness of mind is a one-shot movement. But then if effort comes in, that no longer seems simultaneous or spontaneous.

R: Effort comes in off and on, at the beginning, during and at the end. For instance, you are holding that microphone because you had an interest in asking a question. Now while you are listening to the answer, you have forgotten that you are holding the microphone, but that original effort is still hanging over. You are still holding it, not dropping it. So a lot of journeys back and forth take place with one's effort, rather than its being maintained constantly. Therefore you do not have to strain and push constantly. If you do, there is no practice, no meditation. The whole thing just becomes a big deal of effort. That shifting, alternating constantly, creates the space of meditation. If you are one hundred percent effortful, you blow the whole thing. There is nothing left but a tense lump of muscle sitting in the middle of a field. This happens all the time in life situations. It is like trying to knead dough. If you knead too hard you don't have any dough left in your hand, you are just pushing your hand against the board. You can knead dough hard if you have the feeling that the purpose of kneading hard is to work with the dough. Then you have some compromises taking place, some intelligence comes into play. Without that, effort alone just kills.

Q: Without exercising some kind of incredible deliberateness, my entire meditation practice seems to be fantasy. There seems to be hardly any time of relating with my breath. It is basically just sitting there daydreaming or else very deliberately, heavyhandedly trying to relate with my breath.

R: Well, go and sit.

Q: What should I do when I sit?

R: Sit.

Q: That's all? What about working with my breath?

R: Sit. Go ahead and sit. Just go ahead and do it.