



## Stillness of the Heart and Right Effort

*[Discourse given on a seven day Art of Meditation Foundation Level 1 retreat in Wales]*

Analogy:

If you take a water droplet and drop it into a tank of water: 8 hours after it was last touched that water in-drop would still be swirling and moving out, only after 24 hours will it just drop and expansion and make it just drop perfectly like that

Now our heart, which is actually the landing mechanism – (and I know I haven't explained this to you yet but I don't want you to get too tied up with... the sort of... 'technology' here) – the mechanism by which we are actually landing our experiences... let's just leave it like that let's just call it, 'the basic ground for our awareness' – it is like water: your capacity to land your experience and see it for what it is depends upon how still or disturbed it is. If you look at a reflection of the moon in a highly disturbed body of water it doesn't look anything like the moon, it looks anything but the moon. You know you're looking at a reflection of the moon because you know it's the moon, but if it was normal circumstances that you didn't know it was the moon then you 'd have no idea what you were

looking at in that highly disturbed body of water. And that's the problem with life: we look at it through a mechanism that is constantly disturbed by what's happening to it. This is why the buddha's message to us was do not try to understand the nature of your mind until first you've learnt to understand the nature of this body (the mechanism by which you have this experience) – The Buddha said 'he who tries to understand the mind before understanding the body will fall from the path like a mountain-goat that takes an unfamiliar route' which means that we can not figure this out just by looking at it and trying to figure it out in our mind. We've been trying for goodness knows how long...

It's only when you allow yourself to be undisturbed enough, that your heart settles and that basic ground of your awareness becomes mirror-like enough to reflect the nature of your experience back to you so that you can really see it for what it is.

We don't try and untangle the knot until we are deeply settled. Don't even try to concentrate until you are deeply settled through the 'resting in stillness' practise. The very basic practise that I asked you to try yesterday and keep trying before making any efforts to concentrate (and this is all long before we make any effort to 'try and figure out what's actually going on here') all of it stands upon us allowing ourselves to get to a place where we feel (even if only momentarily) undisturbed.

Now: what are we actually disturbed by? What actually disturbs this basic ground of our awareness? If I was to say right now 'you know what, I think you're a bunch of idiots I'm completely wasting my time' you carry on I'm going for a hike' and I walked out – what would have actually disturbed you? Go on answer me somebody?

Student: Is it grasping or aversion?

The way you react to what's happening to you. You know some of you sitting there will go 'Ok well there's Burgs he's having another bad day' and then just sit down and get straight on with your meditation. And somebody might go 'I can't believe it! Who is this

character!' and you get up and leave with me.

It isn't what happens to us that is disturbing us. Occasionally it's unpleasant, of course. But most of the time it's not even actually afflicting us. What is disturbing us is how we meet our experiences in our mind. So in order to get to the place where you can see for yourself the mechanism by which this is all happening you have to allow yourself to become still enough to be undisturbed in the moment which means that if it's your mind that's disturbing you, you have to for a while, leave everything alone with your mind and just settle into the ordinary moment that's actually going on before you added anything to it:

- you're just sitting there and that's it – and you've just got to 'be there' – and relax into it (settle)

And as you settle...

And what you might have woken up with: maybe you are feeling all over the shop because you're not getting all that coffee you're used to, or maybe you had a disturbing dream, and you could have been walking up to this exercise room just now full of yourself (with your mind churning and churning), completely failing to sort of... 'spot' that it's an extraordinary day out there, and you come in here and your mind is churning around as there's no quietness. But what's actually going on? I'm standing here and you're sitting there, and behind it is just resting. When you start to just rest within it your heart starts to become coherent and you can see really clearly that the disturbances were generated in your mind.

We're going to go on to investigate and understand and we will learn to uproot, dismantle and let go some of the structures and habit patterns that we have going on in our mind that do disturb us – but if we want to do that we have to settle enough calmly first, so we can see that mechanism at work. So don't, now is not yet the time. Now is the time to lay the ground.

If your heart-base is volatile and prone to shaking i.e. if the ground

of your awareness is volatile and prone to shaking then the slightest reaction going on in your mind or slightest disturbances outside creates a reaction in your mind creates and that's another pebble in the lake that disturbs you. We first have to build a platform that can land disturbances without being disturbed.

The first part of our practise is to still ourselves. The second part of our practise is to build the platform upon which we land the experiences that challenge us. And then the next part of the practise is to land the experiences that challenge us and get to the point where they don't. So we do this part of the practise (to deeply settle), and we learn to settle when we aren't disturbed like now. When find a way of remaining settled when we are disturbed; even just the little things like... 'need your morning coffee' or 'not being quite comfortable' or 'it not being quite the way you want' – all of that 'willingness to be with the things that you normally reject' start to build a platform. Because those things aren't really challenging. There are challenging things that we want to know we can handle/manage. So we start by allowing ourselves to be with the things that we just find inconvenient that we would normally seek to reject and we allow ourselves to be with them.

So today, once you start to settle with enthusiasm for just making your initial effort and finding that stillness – when you find it challenging that's your time to keep working and not reject because our ability to navigate life without being upset and destabilised by it is a reflection of how stable is this ground that we landed on. So we've got what challenged us personally, and we've got life going on out there – and it is what it is – if we want to come to a composed place within it so that we can embrace it and meet it positively then we need to build this platform. And you're doing that when your meditation isn't going well and you're still trying hard, when you're not comfortable and you don't get frustrated and you keep trying when normally you would give up. Yes? Or when you feel that restlessness or when you feel that aversion and you say to yourself that 'I'm just going to carry on patiently and I'm going to build my concentration.

The Buddha talked about it in terms of 'right effort' one of the 8 branches of the path that he suggested made for a less painful way out of suffering. (The 8 Fold Noble Path).

Of the 8 Fold Noble Path, the 3 parts that represent the cultivation of the mind are:

- **Right Concentration**
- **Right Mindfulness**
- **Right Effort**

So right now I am going to explain Right Effort:

### **Right Effort**

this Right Effort has 4 aspects to it:

- the Effort to generate the positive qualities of mind that do not tend to arise in me
- the Effort that it takes to support and cultivate the growth of the positive qualities of the mind that are already seeded in me.
- the Effort that it takes to surmount the unwholesome tendencies of mind that already are habitual in me
- the Effort that it takes to restrain the arising of unwholesome states that don't tend to arise in me but could

And that's where we start this process of the refinement of the make-up of our character – that makes for a more stable heart-base (or 'ground' if you like).

- *the Effort that it takes to support and cultivate the growth of the positive qualities of the mind that already have seeded in me* – here we already naturally feel a degree of compassion or generosity of spirit or kindness – so it is the effort we make to encourage the growth of these things.
- *the Effort to generate the positive qualities that do not arise*

– so we might not be generous by nature for example, or we might not be kind by nature: so it's the effort to generate the positive qualities that are lacking.

- *the Effort to surmount the unwholesome that it already habitual* – so we tend to be more prone towards being greed-rooted or aversion-rooted: so these are two of the unwholesome roots to the mind – there are all other kinds of mental-states but if you are by nature greedy then it's the effort to surmount that habitual tendency towards greed. If you are by nature aversion-rooted then it's the effort to surmount the nature of that aversion. Or if you are ignorant-rooted the 3<sup>rd</sup> unwholesome root, the effort we make to pay attention to what is going on and the effort we make to generate wisdom and not 'ignore' our experience.
- *the Effort to 'guard against' the unwholesome that could arise* – So here's an example: you might be a reasonable person until such-time as your buttons are pushed enough, and then you might do something that really you might later regret – so you might not be violent by nature but there's a possibility that you could be violent, you might not be greedy by nature until such time as something is put in-front of you that you just can't bear not to have and then all of a sudden all of your normal degrees of restraint are thrown out of the window in the pursuit of that thing you have to have. So this is what we mean to guard against the unwholesome states that could arise but don't necessarily arise.

Alright. So, when we're trying to meditate, the effort that it takes to settle calmly within ourselves will depend upon the attitude that we bring to it: you can sit there and spend the whole day with smoke coming out of your ears desperately trying to concentrate on your thumbnail: or you can be more fluid in the way in which you approach it and realise that my ability to concentrate is a reflection of the ground I'm standing on (landing my experience on right now) and that is a reflection of how I'm reacting to what's going on around me and if I can just settle and leave it, it will go very quickly

and my heart will start to be settled and then I'll be able to concentrate – but if you're 'concentrating' whilst still outraged that Manchester city beat Manchester united last night and you can't let it go all day you're not going to get concentrated or whatever it is that outrages you, you've got to let it go momentarily.

Later on we can figure it all out, but for now you just have to accept and allow things to be, because your heart won't settle calmly enough to become mirror-like until you do, and then you start to concentrate. So when you find you can't concentrate don't get frustrated or don't worry about the fact you get frustrated, take the steps back go back far enough 'ok, I'm huffing and puffing because I'm not enjoying this' go back: those basic steps to setting up your practice that I teach is how you re-establish the ground and if you have to keep going back there twice every meditation go back there and if you have to spend 15 minutes there, spend 15 minutes there until you can feel the stillness in the room. And when you can feel the stillness in the room you know that you're settled within yourself and then you continue.

Alright. Very Good.