

Me-ness and the Emotions

We are going to discuss the meaning of “awake,” which is connected with the practice of vipashyana, or insight, meditation. As a starting point, in order to work with the process of meditation, we have to understand our basic psychological makeup. That could be a long story, but to be concise at this point, let us say that mind has two aspects. One aspect is cognition. That is to say, there is a sense of split between I and other, me and you. This basic sense of split helps us to identify who we are, what we are. Conveniently, we are given names—I am called John, or I am called Michael, and so forth. In general we have no idea beyond the names. The names given to us are so convenient that we don’t have to think behind them. We just accept ourselves as being named so-and-so. If someone asks you, “Who are you?” and you say, “I am Tom,” that’s regarded as a very smart answer, and usually nobody asks, “Well, who and what is Tom?” But if you are asked further questions, the next thing you go to is, “I am a banker” or “I am a cab driver.” You shift to your

profession. You end up jumping back and forth among those external identifications, and usually you never get back to the "me" level. That's the way we usually handle our life. But this time we are going to go beyond the names to the basic mind. We are actually going to find out who we are and what we are. This is the starting point for understanding the mind.

Our mind has this quality of "me-ness," which is obviously not the other, not you. Me-ness is distinct from you, other, the rock, the tree, or the mountains, the rivers, the sky, the sun, the moon—what have you. This me-ness is the basic point here.

There is a general sense of discomfort when you refer to yourself as "me," which is a very subtle discomfort. We usually don't acknowledge or notice it, because it is so subtle, and since it is there all the time, we become immune to it. There is a certain basic ambivalence there. It is like dogs, who at a certain point begin to relate to their leashes as providing security rather than imprisonment. Animals in the zoo feel the same thing. At the beginning they experienced imprisonment, but at some point this became a sense of security. We have the same kind of attitude. We have imprisoned ourselves in a certain way, but at the same time, we feel that this imprisonment is the most secure thing we have. This me-ness or my-ness has a painful quality of imprisonment, but at the same time, it also represents security rather than just pure pain. That is the situ-

ation we are in at this point. Every one of us is in that situation.

This me-ness is not painful in the sense of outright suffering, like what you get from eating a bottle of jalapeño chili peppers. But there's something behind the whole thing that makes us very subtly nauseated, just a little bit. That nausea then becomes somewhat sweet, and we get hooked on that sweetness. Then if we lose our nausea, we also lose our sweet. That is the basic state of mind that everybody feels.

When the first of the four noble truths talks about suffering, this is what it is talking about. There is that very subtle but at the same time very real and very personal thing going on, which sort of pulls us down. Of course there are various occasions when you might feel on top of the world. You have a fantastic vacation by the ocean or in the mountains. You fall in love or you celebrate a success in your career. You find something positive to hang on to. Nobody can deny that every one of us has experienced that kind of glory. But at the same time that we are experiencing that high point of glory, the other end of the canoe, so to speak, is pushed down into the water a bit. That big deal that we are trying to make into a small deal continues to happen. Sometimes when it comes up on the surface, we call it depression. We think, "I feel bad, I feel sick, I feel terrible, I feel upset," and so forth. But at the same time, it is really something less than that. There

is a basic, fundamental hangover, an all-pervasive hangover that is always taking place. Even though we may be feeling good about things, we have the sense of being stuck somewhere.

Often people interpret that sense of being stuck in such a way that they can blame it on having to put up with their parents' hang-ups, or on hang-ups resulting from some other part of their problematic case history. You had a bad experience, you say, therefore, this hang-up exists. People come up with these very convenient case-historical interpretations, maybe even bringing in physical symptoms. These are the very convenient escapes that we have.

But really there is something more than that involved, something that transcends one's case history. We do feel something that goes beyond parents, beyond a bad childhood, a bad birth, a difficult cesarean—whatever. There is something beyond all that taking place, a basic fuckedupedness that is all-pervasive. What Buddha calls it is ego, or neurosis.

That is the first of the two aspects of the mind we mentioned. It's something we carry with us all the time. I'm afraid it is rather depressing.

The second aspect of mind, which comes out of this one, is what is popularly known as emotions. This includes emotions of all types, such as lust, hatred, jealousy, pride, fear—all kinds of things. However, the word *emotion* is questionable. By calling them emotions

we come to look at them as something special, "my emotions," which brings a rather unhealthy way of looking at ourselves. We think, "If only I could get rid of my emotions, my outrageousness, then I could function peacefully and beautifully." But somehow that never happens. Nobody has yet achieved a state without emotions and still had a functioning mind.

From the Buddhist point of view, this second aspect of mind is not emotion as such; rather these eruptions that occasionally take place in our mind also are regarded as thoughts. They are part of the thinking process; they are a heavier instance of the thinking process, rather than a phenomenon of a different type, as though there were a special disease, like smallpox or something, called emotions. They are just a heavy-handed flu.

This first aspect of mind is mainly occupied with duality, the basic split, the sense of being fundamentally alone. This second aspect goes beyond that; it is highly occupied, extremely active. It produces daydreams and dreams and memories and stores them in the "akashic records," or whatever you would like to call it.⁶ It stores them all over the place, and it reopens them and reexplores them whenever we run out of material, whenever we have a conflict or a confrontation with the other. We are constantly trying to work out our relation to the other. It's like your dog meeting somebody else's dog. There is a growl, a sniff, a step forward, a poten-

tial rejection, or maybe an acceptance. That kind of thing is constantly taking place. Dogs do it very generously. As far as we human beings are concerned, obviously we are more subtle, but we are less generous because we have more me. But still this process goes on constantly—we do that when we confront our world.

This cannot just be called emotion; it is something greater, more overall. The thought process escalates to a level of high intensity—so-called emotion. But this second mental faculty is actually a confrontation process, a communication process that goes on all the time. And that confrontation and communication consists of thought patterns alone—nothing else. Sometimes your thought looks, sometimes your thought speaks, sometimes your thought listens, sometimes your thought smells, sometimes your thought feels. It's a thought process that takes place.

This is also connected with the process of sense perception. According to the Buddhist tradition, there is a sixth kind of sense perception, which is actually mental. It is the fickleness of mind, the sixth sense, which acts as the switchboard that all the wires come into—from your ears, from your nose, your eyes, your tongue, your body. These sense organs report their messages to the central headquarters, the switchboard, and the switchboard delegates certain activities by way of response.

So that is basically the way the whole mental process works, which does not give us any grounds for separat-

ing thought process from emotions. All these aspects are part of the same process that takes place.

In studying vipashyana, we are going to discuss dealing with those thought processes in the practice of meditation. But first it is necessary for you to understand the basic ground, what the basic mechanism is: who is going to meditate, and what we are going to meditate with. We are going to be talking about the way of working with thoughts, with the second aspect of mind. We have very little resources at this point for working with the first aspect of mind, the basic fucked-upedness. That mentality of dualism, or the split, cannot be handled directly, I'm afraid. But hopefully it can be uplifted by dealing with its products.

We could say that the thought process, including the so-called emotions, is like the branches of a tree. By cutting step by step through the elaborate setup of the branches, we come to the root, and at that point the root will not be difficult to deal with. So the thought process seems to be our starting point.

You might say, "Wouldn't a good strategist cut the root first?" Obviously, he would; but we are not in a position to do so. Actually, if we started by trying to struggle with the root, the branches would keep on growing, and we would be completely and helplessly engulfed by the rampant growth of the branches and the fruits dropping on our heads.

So Buddha's psychological approach is a different

one. We start dealing with the leaves and branches. Then once we have dealt with that, we have some kind of realization of the naked truth, of the reality of the basic split. Then we begin to realize the first noble truth, which says that the truth is suffering, the truth is that hang-up, that problem.⁷

In order to understand the first noble truth, we have to understand how to live with "emotions." We will have a certain amount of time to discuss that in this present seminar. Now perhaps we could have a discussion.

STUDENT: We start work with what we normally think of as emotions, with the thought process as a whole, which is the branches and leaves of the trees. And the cognitive process is more the root, which we get to later?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: That's right. In order to scrub the floor, first we have to clean it off. Once you clean it off, you know what you are doing. It's a reasonable way of handling the whole thing. You start with what you have immediately available, which brings you an enormous contact with reality. Whereas if you were to try to relate to the basic duality, you would just find it impossible. Instead of trying to work brick by brick, it would be like trying to push down a whole wall. You would end up with a defeat. So it's better to start with small things that are quite pronounced rather than

starting with the fundamental subtleties and trying to sort out the whole problem.

STUDENT: Do these fundamental subtleties come up disguised as fantasies?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: They are more or less the same thing as the fantasies, but they can't really be disguised. The root of a tree can't be disguised as the leaves. The root has to remain the root in order to hold up the leaves and branches. The basic subtleties act as a sustainer, so they have to keep their position.

STUDENT: Emotions are accompanied by physical sensations. Are those also thoughts?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Yes. That does not mean to say that you don't feel physically, but your body is also your thought. For example, if you cut your finger while you're chopping an onion, you have a bleeding thought. But it's real. Thoughts shouldn't be dismissed as "just thoughts." Such a thought is so real, it's tangible.

STUDENT: Would you mind clarifying those two aspects of mind again? The first one is characterized as the basic duality between me and the other; and the second one, a worse case, involves intense thoughts. Is that right?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: It's quite simple. The first one is basic duality, and the second one is the activities of that.

S: Can they be separated as a first form of thought and then a second?

TR: They are not the first or second thoughts, but the roots and the branches.

S: The first one is the root.

TR: Yes.

S: So we have to get at the root through the branches.

TR: Yes, we have to start with the branches first.

S: So when we see through the very highly differentiated thoughts and sensations that we're involved with, then we come to the more fundamental thing between self and other.

TR: Yes. If you start by tackling the self and other, in tackling that you start more branches, so you have an endless job.

S: I see.

TR: Anyway, that's what we said.

STUDENT: I grasp what you're saying abstractly, but I'm wanting to put it into some experiential framework so it's not just an abstract idea.

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: Well, that's why you are here, obviously. We will discuss the details in the coming talks. To begin with, I wanted to make clear what subject we would be discussing and give you a basic map. That might be somewhat abstract or not particularly pragmatic at this point.

STUDENT: Is the sixth sense you mentioned related to intuition?

TRUNGPA RINPOCHE: It's a lot of things—intuition, paranoia, hope and fear—all kinds of things. Intuition is included, but in this case intuition has some kind of a reference point. Therefore you have intuition that is different from the enlightened kind of intuition, which is wisdom. Here this is intuition on a very crude level.