

SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVITY

SETTLING, WATCHING, AND JUST SITTING

FIVE JUSTS

In talking about just sitting, Subhuti came up with a list of 'five justs' which are:

1. Just Settling
2. Just Waiting
3. Just Watching
4. Just Enjoying
5. Just sitting proper

I will say something about just settling, as a way in to meditation practice: an approach one can take from the beginning of a sit.

Following this, I will say something about 'Just sitting proper' as the state we are moving towards in just sitting.

Then I will look more at 'Just watching' as an intermediate state one might find oneself in, and how to move on from that.

JUST SETTLING

In just settling, we

- deeply relax in to the meditation
- letting the content of the mind settle
- letting the mind unravel
- so that the mind is not stirred
- so that the sense of the awareness brought to experience becomes subtler

We may find that as we do this, we pick up a subtle sense of watching our experience: so that something in our experience is identified with as 'me' watching something else, which is identified with as 'other': more about this later

JUST SITTING PROPER

In moving on from here in to just sitting proper, we

- relax out of the tendency of the mind to relate to experience in terms of self and other
- leading to an aware experience: not awareness experiencing content, just aware content.
- Bhante describes the beginning of this state in his talk "from alienated awareness to integrated awareness":

The third level is that of experience plus awareness. This is integrated awareness. Here, by very virtue of the fact that we are now experiencing integrated awareness, the emotional experience tends to be a positive rather than a negative one. Here we have the experience, but also, saturating the experience, identical even with the experience, we have awareness. The awareness and the experience have come together. We might say that the awareness gives clarity to the experience, while the experience gives substance to the awareness. The awareness and the experience coalesce, without it being really possible to draw a line between the two, isolating the experience on this side and the awareness on that side. You are fully immersed in the emotion, in the sense of actually experiencing it, but at the same time, together with it, without being different from it, there is the awareness.

- At this point, the mind knows its own nature: mind knowing itself, but not as an object
- A simile for this is the self-illuminating image on a screen, as opposed to a spotlight shining on an object - bringing the light of awareness (subject) to the content (object). With the self-illuminating image, the image is itself both form and illumination: both experience and awareness. We can talk about the brightness of the image, but we can't separate the illumination from the image.

JUST WATCHING

Whilst just settling is a helpful practice, and just sitting proper is the aim of the practice, watching is characteristic of alienated awareness, so 'just watching' may be a state we find ourselves in, but it is not one we would want to cultivate.

The alienation involved in just watching may be subtle. It's a bit akin to the subtle hindrance of proliferating: whilst proliferation of thoughts may be a state we find ourselves in, and it may be a more settled state than the full blown anxiety we started the meditation with, proliferation is not something we would aim to cultivate and develop in meditation.

On the other hand, 'watching' may characterise a strongly alienated state. The hallmark of 'watching' as a strongly, unobtrusively alienated state is a cold detachment, calculating – possibly even hostile, like a marksman watching his target.

So 'Just watching' is not something we want to make a practice of. Where we notice it's happening, it's something to make a practice of moving on from by seeing through it and relaxing out of it.

We do this by relaxing out of the activity of creating that separation between the part of experience identified with as the 'watcher' and the part identified with as the 'watched'. This involves

- binging in or connecting with a sense of warmth, sensitivity, tenderness, intimacy to counter any cold detachment in the watching
- and then
- noticing the sense of separation in the sense of watching
- noticing any sense of tension or unsatisfactoriness in that
- noticing the view underlying that: basic stories about how we're perceiving 'the world'
- investigating these to see if we can find what we're assuming is there (a watcher, a separation between awareness and experience)
- not finding this, we become aware of this tangible absence: a not-seeing
- relaxing in to an awareness centred on this tangible absence (seeing by not-seeing)
- in this way relaxing out of this way of relating to experience as something watched from a distance
- continuing this unfabricating as far as possible
- moving on to integrated awareness: just sitting proper when possible

MILAREPA ON SEEING BY NOT-SEEING

Milarepa described this practice of seeing by not-seeing in his song to the shepherd boy:

This consciousness that clings to an "I":

If you look, you definitely won't be able to see it.

By the power of meditating on Mahamudra,

You'll see by not seeing anything at all.

...

Having been lifted up with a pure aspiration
To the completely pure path of seeing,
There, vipashyana directly realises the purity that cannot be seen
And then the faults of mind's hopes and fears will be known.
Without going anywhere, you'll arrive at the Buddha's ground.
Without looking at anything, you'll see dharmakaya.
Without achieving anything, your aim will be spontaneously accomplished.

MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

This subtly alienated sense of watching experience is characteristic of the approach of watching the breath in the mindfulness of breathing. In this case there is both

- an alienation that sets up a watcher at a distance from what is watched – and
- an objectifying of experience: making the disparate flow of physical sense experience into a single object: “the breath” which can be followed, as though it had a single location moving up and down the windpipe.

These two tend to go together: when we identify with one part of or location in our experience, everything else becomes ‘other’. This is khandha dukkha: the suffering of being identified.

SOURCES

Subhuti: the 5 Justs quoted in a talk by Vessantara at

<http://www.vessantara.net/home/talks-and-writing/talks-and-articles/spiritual-receptivity-and-just-sitting>

Sangharakshita: Talk: from Alienated Awareness to Integrated Awareness (particularly track 8) at

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=84>

Milarepa: The Shepherd's Search for Mind in the 100,000 songs of Milarepa