

止觀之道

——摘錄自《聖道修行》

◆ 坦尼沙羅比丘 原著

◆ 鄭振煌 中譯

許多人告訴我們，佛陀教導了「止」和「觀」兩種不同的禪修。他們說「觀」是直接的途徑，但是「止」是景色優美卻高風險的路線，因為你很容易陷入其中而永不得脫身。但是當你確實去看佛陀的教導時，你會發現他從未分開這兩個修法。止觀是一體的兩面。每一次佛陀解釋「觀」和它在修道上的地位時，他明確地說明修觀的目的在於引導心進入「正定」：讓心安住在穩定、自在的地方，以便如實知見事物的原貌。

「止觀為兩種修法」的部分議題集中在我們如何了解「禪那」一詞，它是「正定」的同義詞。我們大多數人都聽說禪那是非常深入的出神狀態，行者的眼睛要凝視不動，並且要封閉跟外界的聯繫。這聽起來一點也不像「觀」。但是只要看看佛陀對禪那的描述，就可知道他所談的並不是上述狀態。禪那是非常愉悅的全身凝然不動，覺知全身。佛陀曾經用兩個意象來描述這種狀態：一是把水和入麵糰中，讓水完全滲透麵粉；二是湖中有冷泉湧出，遍滿全湖。

現在，當你與身體成爲一體時，你便是活在當下。如同佛陀所說，第四禪——身體充滿清朗的覺知——即是捨念清淨。所以，結合觀禪和安止的全身覺知應該是沒問題的。事實上，佛陀教授觀出入息的前四步驟，即是止觀的結合：一、知息長，二、知息短，三、了知身體在出入息的狀態，四、止息呼吸時的身體感受。如同經典所說，這是基本的修觀法門，也是基礎的修正法門。你在修習「正念」的同時，你也在進入初禪——「正定」。

想要知道「正念」和「正定」如何彼此增上，我們可以從《念處經》修觀的三個階段一窺究竟。以身體爲例，第一階段是內有色想觀外色解脫（專注於身體，放下對外界的貪婪和憂慮）。意思是把身體只看做身體，不去想它的意義或它在世間的功用。當我們以世界的角度來思維自己時，就會生起好看或不好看、健壯或虛弱、敏捷或笨拙之類的擔憂，佛陀說這些都要放下。

坐在這裡，觀身體就好。當你閉上眼睛時，你擁有什么？有你有用以坐下來「身體」的感覺。身就是心的安住之處。注意力試著不離開身體，不斷讓心回到這個身體的感覺上，直到它收到訊息而且開始安住下來。在練習的初期，你會發覺心不斷往外攀緣，所以你很容易就注意到心的混亂不堪，足以叫心放下外境，攝心，並安住在身體上。之後，心又往外攀緣另一件事物，所以你告訴心要放下，回來，再次安住在身體上。最後，你的覺知就確實專注在呼吸上而不散亂。你繼續專注在呼吸上。從那時起，無論任何事物進入你的覺知範圍中，都像是某個東西跑出來，在你的手背上搔癢。你不需要注意它，以身體爲主要的專注對象。其他事物來了又去，你覺察到它們，但注意力不要丟下呼吸而追逐它們。這時候，你就真正穩固地專注在身體上了。

當你這麼做時，你會增長心的三個特質。一是「正念」，意思是能夠記憶，念念

不忘。在修「身念處」的時候，正念就是記得於身觀身。你不讓自己忘記。二是「正知」，意思是如實覺知當下發生的事。你是否安住在身上？是否安住在呼吸上？呼吸是否舒暢？只須如實注意當下發生的事。我們容易將「正念」與「正知」混淆，但事實上這兩者是不同的。「正念」意謂能夠記得你的念處，「正知」是覺知正在發生的事。三是「精勤」，它有兩個意思：第一是發覺心已散亂就立刻將心帶回，不任它到處吃草；第二是當心安住在適當的所緣時，如果盡可能敏銳地觀照當下的現象，就不會只是在當下漂流，而是一再深觀呼吸或心的微細變化。當你以這三種品質觀身而住時，心自然就能平靜下來，舒適的安住在當下的身體上。此時你已經準備好進入第二階段了——觀法的生滅。此階段的目的，就是要讓我們瞭解當下生起的因與果。就修定而言，心一旦安住，你就會希望瞭解因果在修定過程中的互動關係，以讓自己的修定技巧更爲純熟；在各種情況下，不管是上座還是下座，心都能更穩固地安住更長一段時間。在實踐上，你必須瞭解念頭如何生滅，方法不僅是觀看這些念頭，還要實際觀察它們的生滅。

在佛陀教我們對治障礙的方法中，亦可見得相同的例子。在第一個階段，佛陀告訴我們覺察障礙的生與滅。某些人誤認爲這是修「不揀擇的覺察」——完全不去掌控自己的念頭，只是單純的坐著，無可奈何地看著任何生起的念頭。然而，在實際的練習中，我們的心還沒準備好那麼做。在這個階段，我們需要一個固定的所緣來評估念頭。如同測量雲在空中的移動，我們也要找一個注視的定點——屋頂的尖端或電線桿——才能夠知道雲是朝哪個方向走，移動速度如何。此法也可用來覺察欲望、惡念等等的生與滅。如果你想在障礙一生起或消滅的當下就立刻覺察，就必須將心繫在一個固定的所緣上，例如呼吸。

假設憤怒正在干擾你的專注，你就不要被捲入憤怒當中，你要覺知憤怒何時生與滅。你要把憤怒純粹當成一個現象，觀其生滅。但是你不要停留在那裡，當你繼續專注呼吸時，下一步是要認清如何使憤怒離開。有時候只要看著憤怒，就足以讓它離開；有時候卻不能，你必須透過其他方法來對治它，例如思辯憤怒是否合理，或是提醒你自己憤怒的過失。在對治憤怒的時候，你必須下一番功夫。你必須嘗試並理解憤怒生起的原因、滅去的原因及如何去除它，因爲你體認到這是不好的狀態。這需要你即時覺知。你要做實驗。你必須趕走你的自我和急躁，才能有覺知犯錯的空間並向錯誤學習，如此才能培養出對治憤怒的技巧。這個問題不只是討厭憤怒並將之去除，或是喜愛憤怒並歡迎它。這兩個方法可能產生短期效果，但是，它們終究並非特別善巧。這裡需要的是有能力看出憤怒是由什麼構成的；你如何分解它。

當你在生氣但不須立即回應對方時，有效果的對治法是溫和地問自己：「你爲什麼生氣？」聽聽看心怎麼說，然後繼續問：「但是爲什麼對『那個』生氣呢？」「當然我生氣，畢竟……」「但是爲什麼要對『那個』生氣呢？」假如你不停地追問，心終究會接受自己有多愚蠢，像是假設人們不應該如此這般（即使他們很明顯的就是那樣），或是人們的行爲應該要符合你的標準，或是其他讓心感到非常尷尬而必須向你隱瞞的任何假設。但是，假如你不斷追根究柢，心最後會招供。

如此一來，你對憤怒就會有深入的了解，並且確實減弱它對你的影響力。在處理正念、靜和定的正面品質時，你可以運用同樣的過程。首先，你覺察它們何時生與滅，然後你瞭解到它們生起時比不生起時好。因此，你試著看它們如何生、如何滅。你要有意識地維持那種止觀狀態，來觀看這些正面品質的生滅。如果你的觀照力很強（這裡完全在講觀照），你就會看到一些維持止觀狀態的善巧方法，不會因患得患失而喪失觀照力，不會因希望心寧靜而讓心靜不下來。你當然想要成功，但是卻必須平等看待成敗，以便從中學習。沒有人對你打分數或評等級，你是為自己而來這裡禪修的。所以，發展念處的過程並非「只是觀看」，更要參預念頭生滅的過程——實際和過程玩遊戲——這樣，你就可以從經驗中學到因果法則是如何在心中運作的。

這可以比喻為廚子對蛋的瞭解。你光是看著一顆蛋就可以學習一些關於蛋的事，但是不會學到太多。要瞭解蛋，你必須把蛋放到鍋中，並且試著用它們做些東西出來。當你這樣做的時候，就會瞭解蛋的千差萬別，蛋對熱、油或奶油等等的反應。因此，實際下廚，並且試著做些蛋製品，你就會真正瞭解蛋。陶土也是一樣：除非你成為陶匠，並實際用陶土做出成品，否則你無法真正瞭解陶土。

心亦然：除非你試著從心創造某種情境，試著讓某種心境生起和持續，否則你無法真正認識你的心。你不知道心的因果過程，因此必須實際參預過程。如此才可以瞭解它。這完全仰賴觀照和發展技巧。發展技巧的要素有三：第一，如實覺知現況。第二，清楚你對現況加些什麼。第三，觀看結果。佛陀談到因果關係時，他說每一個現象都由過去的因和現在加入的因型塑而成。兩種因，你都需要覺知。倘若你不覺知自己對現況加入什麼，你將無法發展任何技巧。當你覺知自己正在做什麼時，你也是在觀察結果。如果有任何差錯，你就回去改變之前的造作，並堅持下去，直到你達到你要的結果。在這過程中，你對於陶土、蛋或任何你想善巧處理的事物，就會學到很多。

對心來說，也是一樣的。當然，你可以把心放在任何狀態以瞭解心的運作。但是，為了發展真正具有穿透力的觀慧，安穩、平衡、正念分明的正定，就是你最想以心製造的最佳奶酥和陶壺。心真正安止下來而生起的喜、輕安、樂等禪支，能助你舒服沉穩地住於當下。一旦心穩固安住，你就能長時間地觀照，以便看到心的構成因素。典型的散亂心念生滅迅速，讓你無法清楚觀察。如同佛陀所說，當你對禪那熟練時，你可以退後一步而確實看到你得到什麼。譬如說，當心安止時，你可以看到哪裡有執著，哪裡就有痛苦或甚至無常。當你看到起心動念的過程，尤其是能觀及所觀的分界線時，就是生起智慧的開始。

這種正念、正定的心境還有另一個優點，當你越來越能安住於這種心境時，你會瞭解喜樂有可能完全不需依賴外在的事物，像是人、關係、別人認可或任何世間議題。這種了悟有助於鬆動你對外在事物的執著。有些人擔心執著禪定，但事實上，在這階段執著禪定是很重要的，因為你可以開始安定下來，而鬆開其他的執著。唯有當禪定成為你最後的執著時，你才可以把它也放下。

為何正定是觀慧的必要條件，還有另一個理由：一旦心具有審察力時，它給你的

基本教訓是你一直是愚癡的。你一直執著，雖然你心底知道不應如此。現在，當人們飢餓疲倦時，試著告訴他們這個道理。他們會馬上回你：「你也是愚癡的。」然後話就談不下去了，什麼事都無法完成。但如果你和一位吃飽精神好的人說話，你們就可以談到各種議題而沒有打架的風險。心也是一樣的。當它充滿正定的喜樂和輕安時，它就準備好要學習了。它可以接受你的批評而不覺得受到威脅或虐待。

所以，這是止在修觀的第二階段所扮演的角色，它給你什麼東西玩耍，它提供一個技巧讓你去培養，如此你就可以瞭解心中的因果法則。你開始看到心只不過是因果相續的串流而已。你的想法是因果相續的一部分，你的情緒、你的自我存在感亦同。這種觀慧開始鬆動你對整個過程的執著。

最後，心達到修觀的第三階段——內心進入圓滿的等捨狀態，這時，就不需要再加入什麼了。《念處經》形容這種狀態是唯有覺知，若此時以身體為所緣，則覺知「唯有身」就足以生起正知和正念，心中不再執著世間任何事物。其他經典則稱此為「無作」的狀態。這時就能夠瞭解心中生起的任何因果過程——包括止、觀的過程——都像焦油娃娃一般：若你把它們拉向自己，就會被黏住；若你把它們推開，結果亦同。那麼，你該怎麼辦呢？你必須不再對當下有所增加，你應放掉對當下的造作。那時心就會豁然開朗。

許多人都想直接跳入第三個階段——不對當下有所增加，但是這不會奏效。除非你有意識地改變心對當下增加的東西，否則你無法覺察到積習難改的心對當下的微細造作。當你愈來愈熟練這種方法後，你就更能覺察到之前沒發覺的微細造作。你將醒悟，瞭解處理當下的最善巧方法就是止息當下的任何造作，即使它們只對心造成最微細的苦惱。你開始逐一放下你在第二階段學到的作意安住，直到內心自然達到等捨的狀態，完全的放下、放開。

所以，重點是要瞭解修觀有這三個階段，以及作意修止的角色，止帶領你通過前兩個階段，好讓你達到第三階段。若不以正定為目標，你就無法培養出瞭解心識的技巧，因為在培養正定的過程當中，才會生起真正的觀慧。你從牧牛過程中的失敗學習，最後牧牛成功了，才能真正瞭解一群牛。同理，你把心中流過的一條條因果串流融入正念和正定的狀態中，並從過程中的成敗學習之後，你才可能意識到內心所有的因果流動。唯有你真正瞭解並掌握這些串流之後（造成苦惱的貪取之流，以及形成解脫之道的止觀之流），你才能放下它們，找到真正的自由。v
(全文完)

The Path of Concentration & Mindfulness

Excerpt from Noble Strategy

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Chinese Translation by Cheng Chen-huang

Many people tell us that the Buddha taught two different types of

meditation--mindfulness meditation and concentration meditation. Mindfulness meditation, they say, is the direct path, while concentration practice is the scenic route that you take at your own risk because it's very easy to get caught there and you may never get out. But when you actually look at what the Buddha taught, he never separates these two practices. They are parts of a single whole. Every time he explains mindfulness and its place in the path, he states clearly that the purpose of mindfulness practice is to lead the mind into a state of Right Concentration: to get the mind to settle down and to find a place where it can really feel stable, at home, where it can look at things steadily and see them for what they are.

Part of the "two practices" issue centers on how we understand the word jhana, which is a synonym for Right Concentration. Many of us have heard that jhana is a very intense trance-like state that requires intense staring and shutting out the rest of the world. It sounds nothing like mindfulness at all. But if you look at the Buddha's descriptions of jhana, that's not the kind of state he's talking about. To be in jhana is to be absorbed, very pleasurably, in the sense of the whole body. A very broad sense of awareness fills the entire body. One of the images the Buddha used to describe this state is that of a person kneading water into dough so that the water permeates throughout the flour. Another is a lake in which a cool spring comes welling up and suffuses the entire lake.

Now, when you're with the body as a whole, you're very much in the present moment. As the Buddha says, the fourth jhana--in which the body is filled with bright awareness--is the point where mindfulness and equanimity become pure. So there should be no problem in combining mindfulness practice with a whole-body awareness that's very settled and still. In fact, the Buddha himself combines them in his description of the first four steps of breath meditation: (1) being aware of long breathing, (2) being aware of short breathing, (3) being aware of the whole body as you breathe in and breathe out, and then (4) calming the sensation of the breath within the body. This, as the texts tell us, is basic mindfulness practice. It's also a basic concentration practice. You're getting into the first jhana--Right Concentration--right there, at the same time you're practicing Right Mindfulness.

To see how Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration help each other in the practice, we can look at the three stages of mindfulness practice given in the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness. Take the body as an example. The first stage is to stay focused on the body in and of itself, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world. What this means is looking at the body simply as a body, without thinking about it in terms of what it means or what it can do in the world. Whether it's good- or bad-looking, strong or weak, agile or clumsy--all the issues we tend to worry about when we think about ourselves in the context of the world: the

Buddha says to put those issues aside.

Just be with the body in and of itself, sitting right here. When you close your eyes, what do you have? There's the sensation of "bodiness?you're sitting with. That's your frame of reference. Try to stay with it. Keep bringing the mind back to this sense of the body until it gets the message and begins to settle down. In the beginning of the practice you find the mind going out to grasp this or that, so you note what's happening enough to tell it to let go, return to the body, and hold on there. Then the mind goes out to grasp something else, so you tell it to let go, come back, and latch onto the body again. Eventually, though, you reach a point where your awareness actually grasps hold of the breath and you don't let go. You keep holding onto it. From that point on, whatever else may come into your awareness is like something coming up and brushing the back of your hand. You don't have to note it. You stay with the body as your basic frame of reference. Other things come and go, you're aware of them, but you don't drop the breath and go grasping after them. This is when you really have established the body as a solid frame of reference.

As you do this, you develop three qualities of mind. One is mindfulness (*sati*). The term mindfulness means being able to remember, to keep something in mind. In the case of establishing the body as a frame of reference, it means remembering to see things in terms of the body. You don't let yourself forget. The second quality, alertness (*sampajanna*), means being aware of what is actually going on in the present. Are you with the body? Are you with the breath? Is the breath comfortable? Simply notice what's actually happening in the present moment. We tend to confuse mindfulness with alertness, but actually they're two separate things: mindfulness means being able to remember where you want to keep your awareness; alertness means being aware of what's actually happening. The third quality, ardency (*atappa*), means two things. One, if you realize that the mind has wandered off, you bring it right back. Immediately. You don't let it go grazing around the pasture. Two, when the mind is with its proper frame of reference, ardency means trying to be as sensitive as possible to what's going on--not just drifting in the present moment, but really trying to penetrate more and more into the subtle details of what's actually happening with the breath or the mind. When you have these three qualities focused on the body in and of itself, you can't help but settle down and get really comfortable with the body in the present moment. That's when you're ready for the second stage in the practice, which is described as being aware of the phenomenon of origination and the phenomenon of passing away. This is a stage where you're trying to understand cause and effect as they occur in the present. In terms of concentration practice, once you've got the mind to settle down, you want to understand the interaction of cause and effect in the process of concentration so that you can become more skillful in the practice, so that you can get

the mind to settle down more solidly for longer periods of time in all sorts of situations, on the cushion and off. To do this, you have to learn about how things arise and pass away in the mind, not by simply watching them, but by actually getting involved in their arising and passing away.

You can see this in the Buddha's instructions for dealing with the hindrances. In the first stage, he says to be aware of the hindrances as they come and go. Some people think that this is an exercise in "choiceless awareness," where you don't try to will the mind in any direction, where you simply sit and watch willy-nilly whatever comes into range. In actual practice, though, the mind isn't yet ready for that. What you need at this stage is a fixed point of reference for evaluating the events in the mind, just as when you're trying to gauge the motion of clouds through the sky: You need to choose at a fixed point--like a roof gable or a light pole--at which to stare so that you can get a sense of which direction and how fast the clouds are moving. The same holds true with the comings and goings of sensual desire, ill will, etc., in the mind. You have to maintain a fixed reference point for the mind--like the breath--if you want to be really sensitive to when there are hindrances in the mind--getting in the way of your reference point--and when there aren't.

Suppose that anger is interfering with your concentration. Instead of getting involved in the anger, you try simply to be aware of when it's there and when it's not. You look at the anger as an event in and of itself--as it comes, as it goes. But you don't stop there. The next step--as you're still working at focusing on the breath--is recognizing how anger can be made to go away. Sometimes simply watching it is enough to make it go away; sometimes it's not, and you have to deal with it in other ways, such as arguing with the reasoning behind the anger or reminding yourself of the drawbacks of anger. In the course of dealing with it, you have to get your hands dirty. You've got to try and figure out why the anger is coming, why it's going, how you can get rid of it, because you realize that it's an unskillful state. And this requires that you improvise. Experiment. You've got to chase your ego and impatience out of the way so that you can have the space to make mistakes and learn from them, so that you can develop a skill in dealing with the anger. It's not just a question of hating the anger and trying to push it away, or of loving the anger and welcoming it. These approaches may give results in the short run, but in the long run they're not especially skillful. What's called for here is the ability to see what the anger is composed of; how can you take it apart.

One technique that gives results--when anger is present and you've in a situation where you don't immediately have to react to people--is simply to ask yourself in a good-natured way, "Okay, why are you angry?" Listen to what the mind has to say. Then pursue the matter: "but why are you angry at that?" "Of course, I'm angry.

After all.....” “Well, why are you angry at that?” If you keep this up, the mind will eventually admit to something stupid, such as the assumption that people shouldn't be such-and-such a way--even though they blatantly are that way--or that people should act in line with your standards, or whatever other assumption the mind finds so embarrassing that it has to keep it hidden from you. But finally, if you keep probing, it'll fess up. You gain a lot of understanding into the anger this way, and can really weaken its power over you.

In dealing with positive qualities--like mindfulness, serenity, and concentration--you make use of a similar process. First, you're aware of when they're there and when they're not. Then you realize that when they're there it's much nicer than when they're not. So you try to figure out how they come, how they go. You do this by consciously trying to maintain that state of mindfulness and concentration. If you're really observant--and this is what it's all about, being observant--you begin to see that there are skillful ways of maintaining the state without getting knocked off kilter by any failure or success in doing so, without letting the desire for a settled state of mind actually get in the way of the mind's settling down. You do want to succeed, but you need a balanced attitude toward failure and success so that you can learn from them. Nobody is keeping score or taking grades. You're here to understand for your own sake. So this process of developing your foundation of mindfulness or developing your frame of reference is not “just watching.” It's more a participation in the process of arising and passing away--actually playing with the process--so that you can learn from experience how cause and effect work in the mind.

This can be compared to the knowledge that cooks have of eggs. You can learn certain things about an egg just by watching it, but you don't learn very much. To learn about eggs you have to put them in a pan and try to make something out of them. As you do this you begin to understand the variations in eggs, the ways that they react to heat, to oil or butter or whatever. And so by actually working with the egg and trying to make something out of it, you really come to understand eggs. It's similar with clay: you really don't know clay until you become a potter and actually try to make something out of the clay.

And it's the same with the mind: unless you actually try to make something out of the mind, try to get a mental state going and keep it going, you don't really know your own mind. You don't know the processes of cause and effect within the mind. There has to be an element of actual participation in the process. That way you can understand it. This all comes down to being observant and developing a skill. The essence of developing a skill means three things. One, you're aware of a situation as it is given. Two, you're aware of what you put into it. Three, you look at the results. When the Buddha talks about causation, he says that every situation is shaped from

two directions: causes coming in from the past and causes you're putting into the present. You need to be sensitive to both. If you aren't sensitive to what you're putting into a situation, you'll never develop any kind of skill. As you're aware of what you're doing, you also look at the results. If something isn't right, you go back and change what you've done, keeping at this until you get the results you want. And in the process, you learn a great deal from the clay, the eggs, or whatever you're trying to deal with skillfully.

The same holds true with the mind. Of course, you could learn something about the mind by trying to get it into any sort of a state, but for the purpose of developing really penetrating insight, a state of stable, balanced, mindful concentration is the best kind of soufflé or pot you want to make with the mind. The factors of pleasure, ease, and rapture that arise when the mind really settles down help you stay comfortably in the present moment, with a low center of gravity. Once the mind is firmly settled, you have something to look at for a long period of time so that you can see what it's made up of. In the typical unbalanced state of the mind, things are appearing and disappearing too fast for you to notice them clearly. But as the Buddha notes, when you get really skilled at jhana, you can step back a bit and actually see what you've got. You can see, say, where there's an element of attachment, where there's an element of stress, or even where there's inconstancy within your balanced state. This is where you begin to gain insight, as you see the natural dividing lines among the different factors of the mind, and in particular, the line between awareness and the objects of awareness.

Another advantage to this mindful, concentrated state is that as you feel more and more at home in it, you begin to realize that happiness and pleasure are possible without any need to depend on things outside--people, relationships, approval from others, or any of the issues that come from being part of the world. This realization helps pry loose your attachments to external things. Some people are afraid of getting attached to a state of calm, but actually, it's very important that you get attached here, so that you begin to settle down and undo your other attachments. Only when this attachment to calm is the only one left do you begin work on loosening it up as well. Still another reason for why solid concentration is necessary for insight is that when discernment comes to the mind, the basic lesson it will teach you is that you've been stupid. You've held onto things even though deep down inside you should have known better. Now, try telling that to people when they're hungry and tired. They'll come right back with, "You're stupid, too," and that's the end of the discussion. Nothing gets accomplished. But if you talk to someone who has eaten a full meal and feels rested, you can broach all kinds of topics without risking a fight. It's the same with the mind. When it has been well fed with the rapture and ease coming from

concentration, it's ready to learn. It can accept your criticisms without feeling threatened or abused.

So. This is the role that concentration practice plays in this second stage of mindfulness practice: It gives you something to play with, a skill to develop so you can begin to understand the factors of cause and effect within the mind. You begin to see the mind as simply a flux of causes with their effects coming back at you. Your ideas are part of this flux of cause and effect, your emotions, your sense of who you are. This insight begins to loosen your attachments to the whole process.

What finally happens is that the mind reaches a third level of mindfulness practice where the mind comes to a state of perfect equilibrium--where you've developed this state of concentration, this state of equilibrium to the point where you don't have to put anything more into it. In the Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness this is described as simply being aware--if you're using the body as your frame of reference, being aware that "there is a body," just enough for knowledge and mindfulness, without being attached to anything in the world. Other texts call this the state of "non-fashioning." The mind reaches the point where you begin to realize that all causal processes in the mind--including the processes of concentration and insight--are like tar babies. If you pull them toward you, you get stuck; if you fight them off, you get stuck. So what are you going to do? You have to get to the point where you're not really contributing anything more to the present moment. You unravel your participation in it. That's when things open up in the mind.

Many people want to jump right in and begin at this level of not adding anything to the present moment, but it doesn't work that way. You can't be sensitive to the subtle things the mind is habitually adding to the present until you've consciously tried to alter what you're adding. As you get more and more skilled, you become more sensitive to the subtle things you didn't realize you were doing. You reach a point of disenchantment, where you realize that the most skillful way of dealing with the present is to drop all levels of participation that cause even the slightest bit of stress in the mind. You start dismantling the levels of participation that you learned in the second stage of the practice, to the point where things reach equilibrium on their own, where there's letting go and release.

So it's important to realize that there are these three stages to mindfulness practice, and to understand the role that deliberate concentration practice plays in taking you through the first two so that you can arrive at the third. Without aiming at Right Concentration, you can't develop the skills needed for understanding the mind--for it's in the process of mastering the skill of mindful concentration that true insight arises. Just as you don't really understand a herd of cattle until you've successfully herded them--learning from all your failures along the way--you can't get a sense of

all the cause-and-effect currents running through the mind until you've learned from your failures and successes in getting them to gather in a state of concentrated mindfulness and mindful concentration. And only when you've really understood and mastered these currents--the currents of craving that cause suffering and stress, and the currents of mindful-ness and concentration that form the Path--can you let them go and find true freedom.v (end)

