

False Boundaries

by Rodney Smith

The thinking mind is not our enemy and is a vital organ for functioning in the world, but its power is overextended and misused. Look around and we immediately see the value of thought by the many constructions and conveniences it has brought to the modern world. The mind is a miraculous and essential tool for navigating life, and through much of our evolution it has also been the perfect organ for assuring our security. When the mind perceived a lion approaching, it differentiated the lion from a tree and initiated a set of actions to move toward one and away from the other.

The problem is that we have internalized this fight or flight strategy and see lions where there are none. We have backed away from life by forming a series of mental boundaries to protect us from internal and external beasts of prey. These boundaries are self-imposed and created by thought because the mind still assumes there is a threat to the organism. One of these boundaries is constructed between the organism and the external environment, another separates our bodies from our minds, and yet another forms a demarcation within the mind, separating the “image of me” from mental qualities we refuse to associate with our image. All of these are imaginarily, but we have painted ourselves into a corner of our minds and feel the stress and tension associated with maintaining those partitions.

Thought has taken over our lives, and it is useful to understand how this has happened. If we start with the raw material on which the mind is built, we see our senses are the data we use for discerning, reasoning, and ultimately acting upon the world. The mind is where these senses merge, and it organizes the data in understandable bits, using memory as the template for recognition and orientation. We proceed forward by knowing what has already occurred in the past. Knowing is the mind’s form of security, and it advances only under the assurance of its history. This knowing confines us to a fixed relationship with objects and obscures the sacred.

Although it is a biological necessity for our minds to separate the organism from the environment, *it is not the truth*. The truth is that all things are together in ways the mind is *incapable* of perceiving. We therefore cannot use the mind as an indication of

what is ultimately true. It responds in accordance with how it organizes the data and therefore thinks in terms of separation. Secondly, since the mind is *part* of the truth of all things, it is incapable of perceiving that truth through the sense doors. The mind uses the senses to externalize objects, and therefore it perceives “God” as external to oneself. We cannot be the truth and perceive the truth in the same moment.

The inevitable fallout from this mental reorganization of reality is the belief in a separate self, formed through this reorganization principle, and perceived as the subject having experiences of reality that lies outside of us. Once “we” have been established, we start arranging the data to suit our desires and fears, and then act upon reality as if it could be harmonized with these states of mind. That is when all hell breaks loose because reality is not divided. Acting upon reality as if we were separate creates the pain and suffering of the world.

If we relate to reality as if we were separate, our meditation practice becomes an attempt to control or influence those external forces to our advantage. This is a very different practice than when we understand our inseparability with life. When that is the basis of our practice, surrendering our separation is the means we apply, and we do not resist anything because we are a part of everything. All practitioners should be aware of the methods they are using and how they are applying these methods because these two views of practice lead to very different results. One strengthens the “I,” and ultimately separates us further, and other dismantles division entirely.

Excerpted from Rodney’s forth-coming book, “Without Me: The Buddha’s Direct Path to Awakening”, to be published by Shambhala Publications in 2009.