You Have a Fascinating Mind

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We’re trying to get the mind quiet so that we can watch the parts of the mind that are not quiet. In the beginning it’s a struggle to settle down. So you try to minimize the struggle. Try to give rise to a sense of well-being. Well-being physically and well-being mentally. Physically, try to breathe in a way that feels open, refreshed. Mentally, think about how fortunate it is you’re here, practicing. You have nothing else impinging on your time right now, nothing else impinging on the mind. And the mind can get to know itself. The most fascinating thing in the world is your own mind. And you’re going to have the chance to watch it, because after all, it does shape your life. And sometimes it shapes it well. Sometimes it shapes it well, and sometimes not so well. So you want to look at it to see what’s the difference. So we try to gather the mind around one object, like the breath. The word ega-gatha, singleness of mind, the word aga in that ega-gatha, has many meanings, but the meaning that seems to be most appropriate is a meeting place, a gathering place. That’s the ega, aga, gathering place. Dha is the suffix that turns it into a noun. That’s the quality you’re trying to develop with everything gathered together right here. In the beginning, there have to be adjustments. As you adjust the mind and the breath, you adjust the breath to the mind. It’s like being a carpenter trying to fit two pieces of wood together. First you sand this piece of wood, and then you sand that piece of wood, and then the other one, back and forth, until everything is just right. So what kind of breathing would the mind like to watch right now? Deep breathing, shallow breathing, heavy, light, fast, slow. You’ve got your choice. When you find something that feels really good, you stick with it. If it starts feeling not so good, well, you can change again. But once it feels good, think of that sense of ease being maintained. You breathe in a way that doesn’t disturb it. Breathe out in a way that doesn’t disturb it. Once you can maintain it like that, think of it spreading out, oozing out through the body. Think of it lapping around all the parts of the body. So your sense of the body is filled with a sense of well-being. It doesn’t have to be too intense. It’s just really nice to be right here. Sometimes the intensity will develop on its own, sometimes not. What matters is that the mind is able to stay still. It’s a very expansive sense of itself. And then you can drop the direct thought and evaluation. They become unnecessary. John Fung had an image one time. He says it’s like a booster rocket. The big booster shoots things up, and then once its fuel is depleted, it drops away. Then the second booster takes over. In this case, you’re just with the sensation of the breath. And when you’re evaluating the breath, there’s a sense that you’re on one side of the breath, and the breath is slightly separate from the awareness. But once you drop the direct thought and evaluation, there’s a sense that they’re one. Awareness fills the body. Breath fills the body. They’re in the same place together. You don’t have to think about adjusting them. It just feels just right. And John Lee has the image of a post by a sea. The sea rises, the post doesn’t rise. The sea ebbs. The post doesn’t go out with it. Your awareness is centered and still right here. And the waves of breath energy flow through the body. Without you having to cast around too much, just stay centered. So there may be a sense of rapture or a sense of refreshment. It can get very intense in some cases. In other cases, it’s not so intense. But you begin to realize even that is a disturbance. You want something really easeful, calm. So you tune into a more calm level of energy. And the breath gets more and more gentle, lighter. And there’s a strong sense that breath energy fills the body. And it’s all connected. You get to the point where you don’t feel like you even need to breathe. Don’t try to stop the breath. It’ll find its own point of equilibrium. It’s just that the breath energy is so full throughout the body and so well connected that if there’s a lack in one part of the body, then the energy will flow from another part of the body. And that’s even more easeful than breathing. So what you’re doing is letting go, step by step by step, of the scaffolding. That got you here. The direct thought and evaluation, you needed that to stand on. You start the building. And then as the building gets more and more solid and secure, you can let go of the scaffolding. Take the scaffolding down. There’s just that sense of stillness filling everything. Here again, you start looking for disturbances. Little tiny thoughts will appear. Like little stirrings in the range of your awareness. In the beginning, it’s hard to say even whether they’re thoughts or simply physical sensations. They’re on the borderline between the two. But you notice the mind can be pretty quick to label them either as a physical sensation or as a mental sensation. If it’s a mental sensation, it’s a thought. It’s something worth looking into. What kind of thought is this? What is it about? You can make it be about all kinds of things. But here we’re not. We’re not engaged in trying to get more thoughts coming out or trying to nip them in the bud. So zap them, where there’s that little nod of breath energy. Think of a comb going through it and straightening out the strands. And as you do that, you begin to see more clearly the steps by which a thought or a thought world appears. And you go into that thought world and you go traveling around. The quicker you are to catch these little worlds appearing, the more you’ll see the steps that go into creating them. The other place to look for observing how a thought world appears is when you’re going to leave meditation. All of a sudden you’re free to go back to whatever concerns you have. You’re free as in quotation marks there. But there will be a part of the mind that feels, okay, it’s released from its playpen here, released from its prison inside the body, and it wants to go out and think about something. Well, watch that. What motivates it? What’s driving it? And how does it pick up things? How does it choose things? What’s the first thing it picks up? It’s here that the meditation starts getting fascinating as you can observe the mind creating thought worlds for itself, the worlds in which it’s going to live for a little while and which have the potential to become the worlds in which you’re going to be reborn. The process is all being played out right here. The Buddha talks about three kinds of fabrication that go on in the mind. There’s bodily fabrication as you breathe, verbal fabrication as you engage in direct thought and evaluation, and mental fabrication as you engage in feelings and perceptions that shape thoughts in the mind. But there are other contexts where he talks about three kinds of fabrication, bodily, verbal, and mental, in terms of rebirth, macro-level. In cases like that, it’s simply bodily action, verbal action, mental action. But what we’re seeing here as we meditate is we’re seeing the germ forms of those things. Your regular bodily actions require that you have the breath. Otherwise, you couldn’t move the body. Your verbal actions require that you engage in direct thought and evaluation inside the mind. You chat to yourself first before you start chatting with other people. And your mental fabrications, on the large scale, come from feelings and perceptions. So as you’re meditating, you’re getting to see these are the motive forces. They keep the mind going on and on and on. The question is, how can you bring them to a stop? First, you get the mind still so you can watch. And then you begin to realize the stillness of the mind contains all the germs of those going on and on and on. We think that our distractions are the problem. And they are. But they’re not the only problem. You get the mind still so that you can clear away the unstill parts. And then when they’re cleared away, you begin to realize that the stillness that you’re holding onto is not quite as still as you thought it was. It contains all those fabrications on very subtle levels. You’re directing thoughts to the breath, evaluating the breath. That’s physical and verbal fabrication right there. And, of course, there are the perceptions that hold you with the breath and the feelings, the pleasure that you’re trying to create with the breath. So in a seed form, everything that you need to know is right here. And you see them in the seeds. It’s a lot easier to deal with them before you’ve let them grow up into a big field full of weeds. You get to choose which kind of seeds you’re going to use. You’re going to nurture which ones you’re not. So you can nurture just the plants that will be useful. So when the mind gets still, the first order of business is to maintain that stillness so that it can be good and solid. But then use it to start exploring. In Jhammaha, the boy’s image is of a pile of lumber. You get the lumber all stacked up nicely. But if it’s just stacked there and it’s not used to build a house, it’s not much use. You have to cut it and shape it. Ask questions. So you ask questions about the mind in the same way. Cut and shape the mind. As you get more sensitive to the stillness of the mind, you begin to see layers of disturbance that you wouldn’t have seen before. So remember, the most fascinating thing in the world is right here, showing itself. Sometimes telling the truth to itself, sometimes lying. Sometimes aware of what it’s showing, sometimes not. And you want to bring steady awareness to it. This means you have to get the mind steady. It’s focused steady. So that the really subtle things will begin to appear.

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