

Hobo Mind

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We spend most of our days like hobos, hopping from one train of thought to the next. But at least hobos have some idea of where they want to go. We're not often all that sure. A train of thought comes along, and we just jump on to it, before we even look to see where it's going, whether it's someplace we want to go. It's no wonder that our minds end up in all kinds of unexpected places. Occasionally, we're lucky to get on a good train of thought, but a lot of times the trains of thought go all helter-skelter, and we can end up in a train wreck.

What you're doing as you meditate is learning how to jump off the trains to land on solid ground and stay here. This is one of the advantages of having the breath as a meditation topic, because it's not a thought. It's a physical sensation. Whatever trains of thought come roaring through our heads, we don't have to go with them. Hold on to the sensations of simply the body sitting here right now, breathing in and breathing out.

You can focus your awareness anywhere you like in the body. The important thing is that you stay grounded in the sense of the body and try to find an area where it feels comfortable, where you feel at ease. If you tend to have headaches, you might want to focus further down in the body below the neck. Then see what happens when you stay there.

Try to make it a game. If you're grim about the meditation, you're missing an important part, which is that, for the mind to settle down, you want to settle down with a sense of ease, a sense of well-being. Think of your sense of the body as a whole crowd of little feeling points, sensation points. In the normal way we breathe, we run through the body in the course of the day in a way that tends to squeeze these points. But here you give them a chance to open up, to blossom, to grow all over the body.

What you're actually doing is relaxing the muscles in your blood vessels, the little tiny, tiny muscles all along. Allow them to relax everywhere. Relax your nerve endings. What happens here, as everything is allowed to relax in this way, is that you gain a sense of fullness. These are the seeds for what the texts call *piti*: rapture, refreshment, a sense of fullness where you don't feel anything physically is lacking right now. Then you can bathe in a sense of ease.

When a sense of comfort arises, you have to be careful to keep your awareness as broad as possible, either going through the body section by section, or just thinking "whole body" all at once. Otherwise, if you get a slight sense of comfort

in a narrow constricted range, the mind tends to curl up around that sense of comfort, and basically goes to sleep. Even if you're not really sleeping, you lose the clarity of your awareness, the clarity of your alertness. This is what's called delusion concentration—the Pali term is *moha-samadhi*. It's pleasant, but it doesn't accomplish anything in the mind.

The real sense of well-being comes when you have this full sense of the body. All your nerves that get frazzled by being tense or being stressed out: When they're allowed to experience a sense of fullness like this, that's what nourishes them, energizes them, so at the very least, the physical energy in the body is wholesome, helpful, healing, and it can't help but have a good effect on the mind.

So when you can get out of the chatter in the mind, reverting simply to the basic physical sensation of having a body, learn how to relate to it in such a way that it grows more full, more satisfying.

This is really an essential skill for the survival of all the good qualities in mind, for the survival of your happiness. Without this sense of fullness, everything gets very dry and shriveled up. And when you have this dry and shriveled up sense inside, it's very difficult to have the strength to do or say what you know is right in difficult circumstances, because the reserves of energy simply aren't there.

This is why we get in touch with the breath right here right now, and why we allow that sense of fullness to spread throughout the body. In the beginning, it may not seem like much, but if you give it time, it'll grow.

It's important in the meditation that you not be too impatient. Otherwise, you're like an inexperienced farmer growing corn. You go out and you look at the corn, and it's a few inches above the ground. You know that's got to be several feet above the ground before it's going to give you ears of corn, so you pull it up to make it tall. Of course, what happens is that it gets uprooted, and that's the end of the plant.

In the same way, the sense of fullness in the body may take a little time. As you get more practice, you find you can access it more quickly. In fact, as the mind gets more and more used to being with the sense of the breath in the present moment, you find you can access it at any time when you really need it.

In the beginning, all that's asked is a little bit of patience, a bit of understanding. The potential for a sense of fullness in the body is there right now. All those little sensation points: All that's needed is that you give them space so that they can begin to grow, to melt into one another. Don't mess with them. Give them space. The reason they get squeezed out is because we give all our attention to our thought worlds or to things outside, so we have to squeeze off this area of our awareness to make sure it doesn't distract us. Now we're turning

around and learning how to nourish this part of our awareness, to give it space. When you give space to this part of your awareness—how the body feels from inside—that provides the foundation you really need in order to deal with thoughts and outside events from a position of strength, from a position of well-being.

It's like going back and unlearning some very basic habits we've picked up a long time ago when we decided that the outside world is more interesting than our sensation the body from the inside. Now we're learning a technique where our awareness can embrace both, with the main focus being on this physical sensation.

So allow this part of your awareness to blossom. You find that when it blossoms, it has all kinds of good things to offer and gives you strength in all kinds of unexpected areas. It's simply a matter giving it some space. When you give it that space, you find that it has a lot more to offer than you might have imagined.