

The Mind Isn't Hot

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Ajaan Fuang once told the story of when he was out meditating in the forest. He had set up his umbrella tent in the evening about this time of night, as things were getting a little bit dark. And before setting it up, he had checked around to see what weather he could anticipate that night, because part of setting up your tent as a forest monk is that you make a vow that once you've set it up, you're not going to move throughout that night. So you have to be careful about how and where you set it up. Don't set it near anthills. And check the weather. If it looks like there's going to be a storm, try to find a sheltered place. But that night, the sky was clear. So he set it up in a fairly exposed place. And sure enough, around midnight a storm came up out of nowhere, dumping rain—and not only the rain, but wind. That meant that the netting of the umbrella tent was pretty useless. The water was dumping in on him.

So he sat up, put all his robes except for his under robe in his bowl to keep them dry, and then sat there meditating. The theme he settled on was, “The body may be wet, but the mind isn't wet. The body may be wet, but the mind isn't wet.” He repeated that to himself and, after a while, he became convinced that it was true. The mind is what? It's awareness. It's just aware. That's what the mind is. It's not hot. It's not cold. It's not wet. It's not dry. It's just aware. The wet or the hot or cold sensations: These are all aspects of the body. If you make that distinction, the mind doesn't have to suffer with these things. In fact, he went into very deep concentration.

The problem is that we go out and lay claim to things. Then when they start getting unpleasant, they start seeping into the mind. The mind suffers.

So today the weather is hot. Tomorrow they're promising even hotter weather. And you have the choice. You can lay claim to the sensations of heat and suffer from them, or you can say that it's hot—not “I am hot.” “It's hot.” Try to keep that sense of distance. Try to maintain your sense of being the observer, simply watching things. Just this much makes it makes it a lot easier to deal with anything that comes up.

One of Ajaan Fuang's students is a woman who's had cancer for many years. She's had to go in for operations many, many times. First, this part had to be cut out. Then that part had to be cut out. I visited her one day after she had had a kidney removed. And this was the day after the operation. I walked into the room, and there she was, sitting up in bed, looking perfectly normal. When I asked her if

there was any pain, she said, Yes, but she just didn't send her mind there. She stayed with her meditation object.

And as long as her mindfulness was strong, her alertness was strong, she didn't have to jump into the pain, get immersed in the pain. The pain didn't have to seep into her mind. So she was perfectly fine. She looked cheerful. She looked like a normal person, not like somebody who just had a kidney removed.

So this is something the meditation can do for you. It helps create a sense of the observer that's separate from the things that are being observed. The way you develop this observer is to learn how to stick with one sensation, even though other things may be bombarding you. After all, meditation is something we learn in the midst of the world where sensory input comes in all the time. Sounds, sights, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas: Your senses are constantly picking these things up. We can complain that there's too much noise, there's too much heat or too much cold, and we get distracted because of these things. Well, there's no place you can go where you're not going to have sensory input. If they put you a place of sensory deprivation, you'd go crazy.

You learn concentration in the midst of what someone once called this booming, buzzing confusion: all the sensory data that's coming in all the time. When you're practicing concentration, you simply decide you're going to hold on to one sensation, one notion, one idea, and anything else that comes up, you're not going to go there.

So think "breath." When you think of the body, when you're experiencing the body, think of it as breath sensations. That's your primary experience of the body, the fact that there's energy moving around. If it weren't for the movement of the energy, you wouldn't know any of the other sensations in the body. You wouldn't have a sense of the body at all.

So just think of everything that you experience in the body as an aspect of breath. Try to maintain that perception in your mind. And then focus on whichever parts the body in which the sense of movement, the sense of energy, seems to be clearest. And allow it to be comfortable. Don't force it too much. Just let it be comfortable coming in, going out. Whatever it's going to do, allow it to be comfortable. And then just stick with that.

This is the part of the meditation that many of us have trouble with. We get to a certain point and say, "Okay, what's next? When will I get the insights? When do I get whatever? It's supposed to come after the mind begins to settle down a little bit." We forget that one of the main points of the practice is to get the mind willing and patient to stay with one thing. If you're going to get any insight, it

comes from sticking with one thing and watching it for long periods of time, watching it continually so that you don't miss any of its important movements.

So when the mind begins to settle down and says, "What next?" you say, "There is no 'what's next.' There's just this." "How about now?" "No, there's just this." Stick here. Stay here. Think of the body as a wide open screen, like the screen on the window, with lots of holes, so that if anything else comes in, it can just go right through. You don't have to set up any resistance. You don't have to react in any way. You don't have to make comments on it. You don't have to catch it to see what it is. Just like a breeze coming through the screen: Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas simply pass through the screen. You stay with the screen. Let these other things go through the holes.

The screen here is the pattern of breath in the body. Just stick with that one thing. As long as you're going to identify with anything, identify with that—that, and the sense of the observer watching that, immersed in that. This is how you begin to develop a sense of the observer that doesn't have to go out and stick its finger into fires. You know it's hot outside, so why go getting involved in the heat? You say, "It's because it's pressing in on me." Well, where is the 'you' that's been pressed in on? What are you identifying with that's getting pressed by the heat? The sensations of heat can be there, but you don't have to latch on to them. You've got something else. You've got the sense of breath energy in the body. Make that your focus. Make that the part that you're identifying with.

As for everything else, just let it pass, pass, pass. This is a really crucial step in training the mind, realizing that there are all these potentials in your range of experience. If you stick your nose into some of the potentials, they bite back. So you learn not to go there. There may be sensations of heat in the body, but you don't have to latch on to them. Other parts of your experience, all these things, seem to infiltrate one another. The breath is in the same place as the heat, it seems. But actually, if you look very carefully, you see that breath sensations are one thing, sensations of heat are something else.

So just focus on the breathiness, and the heat will take care of itself. You don't have to arrange it. You don't have to adjust it. You don't have to try to get control over it. You don't have to get involved in it any way. It's not your responsibility. Your responsibility is to develop a sense of the observer that can stay with one thing consistently.

Once you've done that, it's called the heightened mind. The mind is now not a slave to every sensation that comes in. It's in a position where it can choose what to focus on, what to get involved with and what not. This is called lifting your mind.

So try to develop this sense of the mind that's above the things it knows. It's not oppressed by them because it's not putting itself under them. It's not taking them on. It's not laying claim to them and then getting carried off by them. It's a mind that's safe and secure in its own position.