

## HOW TO MOVE THE MIND

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I am going to share with you a powerful teaching. You have heard the first part before, but the second part is something new that I have not shared here before.

The idea of not being overly "selfish" is nothing new. We all have been brought up with the self and what to do with it. We are told to be our self and be self-confident, but at the same time we are told not to be selfish or think too much of our self. Either way, we are caught up in the self.

Like sticky molasses or a tar baby, the more we struggle with the self, the deeper into it we get stuck, the more attached we become. Remember that attachment does not just mean positive attachment, what we like, but also negative attachment, like when we hate or don't like something. That equally is attachment. The self likes either to get close, back off, or to just ignore.

This bi-polar-ness makes working with self-attachment tricky. Attacking, getting down on, or feeling sorry for our self is just another form of attachment. For all of the many worthwhile achievements that Western civilization has managed, mastering the self (and attachment) is not one of them. This is why we increasingly turn to the Eastern (and Buddhist) views as to managing the self. They have figured it out and we can learn it if we will.

In summary, the more seriously we take the problem of attachment and the self (the more airtime we give it), the stronger our self-attachment gets in response. There is a definite mirror reflection here, which is kind of humorous, like looking at our self in a mirror.

So the bottom line is that struggling with our self, by punishing, admonishing, hating, or about any other approach to the self we might take will never work, and this: on principle. We are just feeding the fire.

What does work, and the approach taken by the Tibetan Buddhists, is to get to know, understand, and even like your self, and not just "your" personal self, but also learning about what the self actually is.

And there is a lot of misinformation about the Buddhist view as to the nature of the self, for example the old-wives tail that the Buddhists claim there is no self. That is a half-truth. Of course there is a self, because we each have one and it acts like our personal nag or secretary every day. What the Buddhists do teach is that this self we each have has no permanent existence, meaning that while it is very much a part of life, it is not going anywhere, like with us when we die.

A proper relationship with our self needs to be a little more formal than that. We should consider treating our self (or at least the being behind the mask) like we are supposed to treat anyone else, cordially, kindly, and compassionately. That is a good start or at least a way of not strengthening the self until we actually have time to get to know the self a little better and discover for ourselves the actual nature of the self. Here is the key:

The way the Buddhists approach the self, however, actually takes some work on our part. Like

getting enlightened, ultimately we have to do everything ourselves. That's the whole point. And here is something else to chew on.

Start to look at yourself, at what you consider as the parts that make up yourself. For example, who are you? Who do you imagine others think you are or are good for? If you had to tell another person who you are and what you can do, what would that be? For example, I am an astrologer, so I could take a look at how I value astrology in my life. Is it part of myself? You bet, but then I could also ask myself this question:

Was astrology always part of my self? The answer is no. When I was younger, I had never even heard of astrology, so this supports the Buddhist view that our self is made up of things we identify with or are currently attached to right now, our personal montage of likes and dislikes. Yet what we identify and what makes up our self changes over time, like a coat of many colors. These ever-changing parts of our self are not our essence, as in who, at heart, we are. Otherwise they would always be there from the beginning. So what is always there in us?

Since I lived quite well without an identification as an astrologer as a kid, it cannot be a permanent part of who I am. Do you get the idea? Try it.

In your spare time, start going through all of the self attributes you have collected around you that amount to a persona, your personal image or self. Can you find even one of them that you have not lived without at one time or another? If you can, tell me what that is.

If you cannot, then that tells you something, that it is an attachment you have rather than who or what you actually are. And do the same for what you don't like.

It would be good if you could find out, then, who is it that has all of these non-essential attachments? If we take away all of what we can (and have) lived without, what and who are we left with?

This is the essence of how the Buddhists begin to approach deconstructing the self, at first kind of intellectually, by thinking about it, as I am presenting. And here is the thing I learned that really opened doors for me:

I had assumed that the mind was always intellectual, which means I depend on understanding most things first intellectually. The mind is intellectual too, of course, but there is another component to the mind that I was never introduced to, much less taught, as a child.

And that is that the mind is also muscular, which sounds like an oxymoron, but it is not. Just as we can understand what muscle-memory is when we learn to play a guitar, you know, learning all the chords, scales, etc. until we can do them automatically.... the mind is, in some way, similar. There is some muscle to the mind.

When we are asked to look at who it is that identifies with astrology or has attachments to it, we make a big mistake if we short-circuit that request by simply understanding this intellectually. Instead, we are being asked to actually struggle some.

For example, right now, look at who is reading this sentence. Don't look at the content of the sentence, which is asking you to look at the looker, but actually attempt to look at who is looking, at who is reading this page.

If you really try that right now (I mean really try), you will feel the effort and, like two magnets repelling one another, you will feel that force of not being able to look or of what you are looking at not holding still.

That force that won't be held can be overcome, my dear friends, and that is the first step to building mind-muscle, only we have to do a lot more of it to become accomplished. But the good news is that you can do this kind of looking-at-the-mind work throughout the day with no problem. That is how I did it, by mixing my mind with my work. And I did this for a long time.

The mind is more than just thinking and understanding. It is deep and we must plumb it not just with the thin thought of "getting the idea," but with our entire heart and being. We have never used this mental muscle and at first it will be very, very difficult to even move around in there at all. It takes effort and practice of a non-intellectual kind to move the mind, but once you get it moving, it will move on its own from then on. I know because I have done this.

And we build this mind-muscle by actually looking at who we are, again and again, over and over. We build on this by looking at all of the components of what (we think) makes up our self, one by one, determining if this or that is essential (and has always been) a part of our self.

The KEY is that we cannot just say to ourselves something like in this example:

"Oh, I get it. If astrology is an attachment (for better or worse), and has not always been part of myself, I will abstract it all and say to myself that nothing (no thing) has been a part of myself and be done with this exercise."

That would be the mistake I made, intellectualizing it. For your sake, please don't do that.

Instead, we must make a mental effort, again and again, to actually look at and track down each part of our self and decide whether this or that attribute, this or that like or dislike, is essential to our self-image, and has always been there. Was there ever a time when we did not have it, and if there was, then it is not essential. And so on. It is not so much the content of what we are examining, the attachments, but the exercise of repeatedly learning to look into the mind and verify things.

It is the effort to move the mind to look inside itself that is key here, not the particular thing we are looking at or looking with. The mind must be moved by exercise, and in the beginning it is very, very difficult to move. We have to learn to do it through practice.

But we can't learn to do this by intellectually understanding it, like we usually do, as in: we see an example and then generalize globally that all examples will be the same, and leave it go at that. We have all been there, done that.

This would be like (using the guitar as an example) grasping how a "C Chord" is made, and then generalizing it to all other chords, without learning each chord, one by one. We have to learn each chord. We have to make the effort to actually look and see if we can see.

In summary, don't succumb to drawing any premature intellectual conclusion to this exercise. That won't work. Actually looking is not that hard, but you have to move the mind around and learn to move around in the mind.

I once used the analogy of setting up a vast circus tent in the mind, one with many peaks,

gradually pushing each pole until the tent is up and we have some room or space in there.

This mental music is very important, and it is something that we westerners apparently have never, ever done. So I have just shared with you a powerful technique that is quite easy enough to do and that can change your life. It did mine.

The dharma is like a train or a sled, hard to get moving, but once moving, is unstoppable.

