

MIND MUSCLE: QUESTIONS OF MYSELF

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Some of you have asked me what comes after we learn the basic meditation of allowing the mind to simply rest. The next step is what is called insight meditation or Vipassana. I don't teach that, but I can give you a taste of what it might involve, should you be interested. I will just mention it here briefly.

What I am about to share with you may sound very intellectual, as in something you do with your mind, like 'think', but it is not. Please don't think about what I am going to say. Don't intellectualize it or assume you 'get it' because you 'think' you understand what I am saying. Chances are you don't, because I am explicitly asking you to not understand me, but to just try and do what I ask, to act.

For one, it requires that we begin to exercise what I call the 'muscle of the mind', for lack of a better word. I know the mind is not a muscle, but I also know that we can learn to move the mind, just as we learn to move a muscle. I was watching my eight-month-old granddaughter Emma begin to attempt to walk the other day, while I held her up by both hands. It was amazing.

She could not just put one foot in front of the other, because she does not know how. Instead, she would lift one leg, kind of shake it around in the air, and eventually sort of throw it forward and put her weight on it, and then the other foot. How slow and difficult it is for an infant to learn to walk.

Learning to use the mind is exactly like that. It requires that we begin to move and use mental 'muscles' we have never, ever, used. It is almost impossible. For years, in the mind training I study, when I was asked to actually work the mind, instead of doing what I was asked, I would simply intellectualize it, think I understood it, but actually not do the exercise being asked of me. I will leave it up to you whether you will leave the level of intellectualization you are comfortable with and subject yourself to the ignominy of trying to walk mentally. Try these requests on for size. Ask of yourself these questions and see how it goes. Please don't be offended by my getting so personal.

Questions

Is it fair to ask you who are you talking to when you talk to yourself? Not only who is listening, but also who is speaking? How is it that you can carry on a conversation with yourself, and be both speaker and listener? Have you tried to look carefully at who is speaking and who is listening. Is that anyone you really know? Do you even like that 'person', and if you don't, then, is that a neurosis? Is that you? If so, then who or what are you? Do you identify with him or her?

And are you more than just that chatterbox?

When we attempt to exercise these thoughts, we are working ourselves inward. And this is not anything very deep, but something very much on the surface that anyone of us can examine. Try it. Most of us have never, ever tried to look at the looker. Are you embarrassed to even attempt to look at who is in there looking, to look at the looker?

What is beyond your discursive mind that keeps your daily schedules, talks to you too much, and is seldom silent? What is in the silence behind your mental chatter? Listen to your chattering sounds sputtering on in the silence. Are you afraid of that silence? Have you ever gone there? What is behind the beyond?

The Storyteller

And just who is that storyteller in your mind, endlessly spinning daydreams and fantasies? More important, who are you reading the stories to? Who is it that is listening to all of these stories and daydreams? Is that also you, another you? How many of you are there? Or is all this mental chatter just your comfort blanket, your own personal way of whistling in the dark of the mind? What's going on behind the scenes?

Mostly we hear our own constant commenting very close to us, this chattering in the dark. What is just beyond the perimeter? Isn't the mind vast? What else is out there or in there, just beyond the point where we have never gone? Is there anything profound about the chatterbox you that rattles on each day? How do we turn it off and just give it a rest? Are you ever just silent? Enough.

Sorry to be so direct, but you get the idea. Learning to use the mind means just that, exercising mental muscles you have never before attempted, and it can be very difficult. Prove it to yourself by trying to look at who is reading this sentence right now. What do you experience? Tell me.

Do you see how easy it is to understand and intellectualize what I am suggesting you do here, as opposed to awkwardly actually try to move the mind to action? I personally spent years intellectualizing this kind of request to actually look, instead of actually looking. When I began to look, I began to make progress.