

Your Inner Coach

October 6, 2019

The mind is like a committee: lots of different opinions, lots of different agendas, lots of different roles in the committee meeting. One of the important roles is the commentator, who comments on the actions of the other committee members, like the commentator at a sports event, the difference being that the commentator at this event is someone that everybody inside the mind gets to hear. It can have a strong impact on their opinions. Somebody has the mic, but you have different members of the committee grabbing hold of the mic, trying to run the show, offering comments on everybody else.

So as you're training the mind, an important rule is to make sure the right people have the mic, and that they know how to use their role as commentator for your good.

Another way you can think of it is like a coach for an athletic team. A good coach knows, on the one hand, how to encourage the athletes, but at the same time how to be strict with them, how to make sure they actually follow their training. And so as you're meditating, you're training your internal coach to be supportive and strict, in the right balance.

When I was staying in France earlier this year, I was staying at a little Swiss-style chalet in the French Alps. It was run by a couple: The husband was English, the wife was Swedish. In the morning, she was talking to us, complaining about having her children raised in French schools. The children were athletic, they had learned how to ski at a very early age and enjoyed it. So she thought that they should be on the ski team at the school. Well, it turned out that the coach of the ski team was extremely discouraging, constantly criticizing the kids, telling them they were hopeless. So they gave up. Something that should have been fun became no fun at all.

So you have to make sure that your internal coach, at the very least, is encouraging, telling you, "You can do this." After all, as the Buddha said, if human beings couldn't abandon unskillful qualities and develop skillful qualities, he wouldn't have bothered to teach. So you have to tell yourself, "Human beings can do this. You're a human being. Other people can do this. If they can do it, why can't you?"

And think of all the good things that come when you've got your mind trained. A lot of people, as they get older, get sick, and approach death, hope to depend on doctors. I know an athlete who was telling me one time that he knew he was pushing his body too hard but he knew he could depend on the doctors to fix it. But there's a limit to how much doctors can do. I've never seen a doctor anywhere who could guarantee that his or her patients would never die. And when they put you in the hospital and they give you the medicines, even though the medicines may be good, you've got a lot of spare time on your hands. What are you going to do with your mind at that time to make sure it doesn't cause you more trouble?

I've seen way too many people spending their time lying in hospital beds watching TV.

They've got an excellent opportunity to watch their minds, observe their minds, get their minds under control, but it gets thrown away. It's hard to start developing this skill when you're in a situation like that, but you can start developing it ahead of time.

So think about the good things that come when your mind is under control. You can be aging, ill, even approaching death, but you don't have to suffer. In other words, learn how to speak to yourself. Make sure your internal meditation coach is the kind of person that gives you hope. Of course, at the same time, you want a coach who is strict with you. After all, this is a training, and the training has its principles, and the consequences of messing up are serious. And although there is some leeway for individual temperament in the practice, in a lot of areas the principles are the same for everybody. So the part of the mind that's always looking for excuses or wants to blame things on the past, blame things on things outside of you, that's the part of the mind you just can't let be in charge.

You have to realize, if the training is going to happen, it's going to happen right now. And right now. And right now. So you want to be on top of the mind right now. In other words, you want your internal coach to be the sort of person who gives you hope, but at the same time, make sure that you act in such a way that the hope is realized. This means you have to approach the present moment with confidence and with a sense of its importance.

Some people, when the meditation doesn't go well, say "Well, I just don't have enough background in meditation," or "I don't have the talent for it." But nine times out of ten, people who start meditating and don't have instant success. They've got to learn how to be the sort of people who don't take that as an obstacle. And you can make yourself that sort of person, training yourself to think in the right ways.

The Buddha, on his wanderings, one time came to a village where the villagers said that they didn't have any particular teacher. Some teachers said one thing, other teachers said the exact opposite, and they didn't know who to listen to. The Buddha gave them two ways of thinking for when you're dealing with things that you don't really know. He said there are some teachers that teach that you have no choices in life, everything is predetermined, and so you might as well just learn how to accept that you have no choices and live with that, and then you can be at peace.

But, the Buddha said, if you adopted that view, it wouldn't encourage you to try to figure out what should be done and what shouldn't be done. And if what should be done was something difficult, you'd have no reason to want to do it, because you'd believe that you had no power to choose. So that kind of view places an obstacle on your becoming a good person, learning how to act well, speak well, think well. So it only makes sense to take the opposite view, that you *do* have choices, that they *do* make a difference, that you can learn how to develop skillful qualities. That's one test.

Another test, he said, was around the issue of whether or not there really is nibbana. Some people say there isn't, and other people say there is. The people who say there isn't close off the door. You'd have to live in a world of conflict, you'd have to live in a world of impermanence, disappointment, sorrow, grief, lamentation, despair. There would be no way out. But if you believe there is such a thing as nibbana, there is a way out. And as it turns

out, the path leading there is an honorable path. So he said, even if it turned out there wasn't such thing as nibbana, the fact that you believe in it and act on it, at the very least encourages you to live an honorable life. And you're giving yourself hope.

So you want to choose your views so that they give you hope, and so that they also give you a reason to be strict with yourself and to try to do what should be done and to abandon what shouldn't, so that you don't get apathetic, you don't get sloppy and careless, you don't get complacent, you don't get defeatist. You take an active part in making your life a better life. That's the kind of coach you want inside.

So listen to the kind of conversation going on the mind. Who is doing the commentating? Learn to recognize when the wrong person has the mic. If the wrong person has the mic, take it away and give it to somebody better. You have that choice. So make the most of it.