

Curbing the Wandering Habit

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Close your eyes, watch your breath, so that you can see the movements of the mind.

When you have the breath as your frame of reference and you have one frame of reference like this, then when the mind moves around, you see it very clearly. You can understand where it's going and *why* it's going. All too often, we find ourselves off someplace and we wonder how we got there. Why did we go? It was because we weren't paying attention. If you pay attention, you can see these things more clearly. And if you have something clear to compare things with, something steady to compare things with, then it's a lot easier.

So stay with the breath. Try to make the breath as comfortable as you can all the way in, all the way out, so that the mind is more willing to stay. And then be on the lookout: It's going to go.

Because that's its old habit: It's been going for who-knows-how-long. That's what samsara is all about, this wandering around. This little wandering mind you have can wander all kinds of places and get you reborn in all kinds of places, too.

You want to understand the process so that at least you can exert some control over it, so that you can be very clear when the mind goes, why it's going. If you see that it's going someplace you don't want it to go, you can stop it.

Otherwise you're like someone who's standing on the side of the road: Someone drives up in a car and says, "Jump in!" and you just jump right in. You don't even know who they are or where they're going. If you lived your life outside like that, you'd be dead by now.

So you have to remember: Not all of the thoughts that come into the mind are friends, not all of them are people you can trust. So you want to have a good firm place to stand, a place where there's a sense of well-being so that you don't feel compelled to jump into everything that comes by. That way you get more in control about where this wandering is going to take you. And eventually you can find a spot where the mind doesn't have to wander anymore.