

Gather All Your Thoughts

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Try to gather all your thoughts right here.

It's not that you're not going to think, but you're going to think right here: Think about the breath, think about the body, think about the mind right here. Are they all together?

If one of them is slipping out, then just bring it back in. For most of us, it's like herding cats. But after a while the animals turn from cats into an animal that you can actually herd, like cattle.

You bring them together and keep them together. In that way, they're protected. Protected from what? Protected from outside influences that might come in and then stir up your greed, aversion, and delusion. But remember: If you didn't have the greed, aversion, and delusion, the outside influences couldn't have any effect on you.

So you can't really blame them. The problem is here inside. So when you're gathered here together, you can see when something comes up in the mind: "Oh, this is greed." At first, it seemed like the normal reaction to something outside. Or the same with anger: It just seems so normal and natural. But when you turn around and look at it, you realize that it's something the mind makes up.

And if it makes itself suffer by doing that, why go with it? You can see where it begins and see where it goes. That's what's good about having your awareness all centered here. If you're scattered around among other things, you don't really notice these things. You have no idea the extent to which you're the one who's causing yourself to suffer.

Your attention is so much focused outside that whatever happens inside the mind, you blame outside. But as you gather things in here you can see: "Oh, this is why the mind is suffering. It's doing this, it's doing that. It's choosing to react in certain ways." Now, in a lot of cases, the choices are so habitual that it doesn't seem like much of a choice at all. You just fall in an old rut and go wherever the rut leads you.

But when you gather your mind here together like this, then you can pull yourself out of those ruts and say, "I don't have to think in those ways. I don't have to react in those ways." That's because you've got everybody right here, watching what's going on.

So this quality of having everybody gathered together here: That's a really important part of the meditation. It's as if you've got eyes all around, watching the mind from every side.

That way, whatever it does, you're going to see it. And you see it early on. You don't have to wait until the greed comes out or the anger comes out in terms of your words and your deeds, or even as a conscious feeling. You begin to realize: All these subtle movements of the mind that used to be subconscious, but now that you're centered in here, are brought up into the level of consciousness. You can realize, "Oh, this is how these thoughts form and I don't have to go along with them."

That's very liberating right there.