

Settle Down

December 23, 2013

Close your eyes and allow all your thoughts to settle down.

Thoughts have been spinning around in the mind all morning. Think of them as being like a big flock of birds, and they just settle down on the wires on the telephone pole, every place that's available. Then just stay there for a while. If any of them goes flying off again, you don't have to follow it. It'll come back. And if it doesn't come back, you don't have to miss it anyhow.

We give so much importance to our thoughts, and our thoughts can be really damaging. A lot of them, if you believe them, lead you to do all kinds of stupid things.

So just because a thought appears in the mind and begins to fly around doesn't mean you have to track it down. In fact, it's an important skill: learning how not to get interested in your thoughts, so you can turn them on and off at will.

It's not that the Buddha wants you to stop thinking entirely. He just wants to give you some more control over your thoughts. And one of the first stages in getting control over them is not jumping on them every time that they start flying around, because who knows where they're going to fly to. If you're not skillful in getting disentangled from your thoughts, they can lead you to all kinds of bad places.

So for the time being, just let everything settle down, settle down. And *you* stay settled down even though other things may be flying around.

That's a second important skill: not getting involved with what's going on around you. Even just in the body as you're sitting here still, there's going to be a lot of activity, such as the simple fact that your heart is pumping blood through your blood vessels. There's a lot of circulation going on in your body right now but you don't have to circulate around with it. You can just stay right here. That's to say nothing of all the activity going on around you all the time.

Some people think that in order to meditate they've got to find some quiet cave someplace where there's no noise and no disturbances. But even in a cave there's lots of disturbances: disturbance in your own mind, in your own body.

So what you've got to learn to do is to settle down in the midst of a lot of other activity. Other things may be moving around but you're not moving around with them. There's that fear that something important's happening, that you're missing out on something: Just learn how to drop that fear. The most important thing in your life is what your mind is doing right now, so you can watch that with your

eyes closed and without getting involved in anything else.

So watch that right here. Don't be worried that you're missing out on other things out there. What you're missing out on is distraction, other people's business. You've got to learn to take care of your own business, get your own mind under control. That's the first order of business.

And the first step in that direction is learning how to step out of your thoughts and not get involved with them. That way, when the time comes, you can step in, step out, and then you know what you're doing, not simply through force of habit.

So learn how to settle down in the midst of activity. You stay till even though other things are moving around. Once you've mastered that skill, you've gone a long way in training the mind.