

Questioning Your Perceptions

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When you come to the monastery, put aside all your baggage. Leave all the issues of home and work at the gate of the monastery.

As you're sitting right here it's just *you* right here. If your thoughts go out latching onto something outside, remind yourself, "That's just a perception. It's just a thought." The issues outside will be there, but what's weighing the mind down right now is the not the issues, it's your thoughts about the issues. One way of dealing with them is learning to question them: "Are you really sure that that's the situation? If you're not sure, why harass the mind with that perception?" Then come back to the breath.

You want to give the mind time to develop its center here so that it has a good solid center to carry into the world—so that when you actually have to deal with the situation outside, you've got a good foundation.

But you've also got to develop a willingness to step back from the situation and learn to question it, "Is it really the way you think it is? Is it really the way you perceive it to be?" Our perceptions really shape our mind. And we can see things in a way where they may be yellow but we have a green perception – so they turn out a different color. It's like a filter that we place on our eyes. The yellow object turns yellow-green, or if you've got a red filter, it turns orange.

So you have to make sure you're not totally invested in the filters. You're able to look around them a bit. Or at the very least question them, "Maybe it's not that way, maybe it isn't orange at all, maybe it's something else." That way you begin to look at your filters. When you can step back from your filters, you're a lot less at their mercy. They don't have the same control over you they had before.

When you listen to the ajaans talking about taking things apart in the mind, it usually comes down to your perceptions. The perceptions you hold onto, the assumptions you make about things, are all based on an image you have in the mind or a few words that go floating around in the mind that get latched on to the situation.

So if you can learn how to question those perceptions, loosen them up a little bit, you find that the things that used to weigh the mind down don't weigh it down so much anymore because you're not carrying them around.

Even when you are dealing directly with the problem outside, you're in a much better position not to get carried away with your old perceptions, your old habits.

So we're trying to create both a center here and also an ability to question our

old ways of thinking. Both of those things acting together can loosen up a lot of the suffering that weighs the mind down.