

Mange in the Mind

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The life of a meditation monk is a wandering life. But if you look at us from the outside, it doesn't seem like we're doing all that much wandering. But Ajaan Mahaboowa makes the point that the real place to wander, the real place to explore, is not so much the outside. It's what's going on inside your own body and mind. For most of us, that's terra incognita, the land we don't know. Like those old maps of the North American continent, the big white space is in the middle. They knew the coast, but they didn't know the interior. That's the way it is with most of us. We know the surface of our lives, but we don't know what's going on inside.

When you're meditating, this is what you want to explore: things inside. As the Buddha said, the world and the end of the world, suffering and the end of suffering can all be found right here in this fathom-long body.

So that should capture your interest right there. This is where suffering comes from, it's inside right here. And the end of suffering can be found here as well. Just that thought should make you want to explore. You could spend your life going to the other side of the mountain, but the question is, does the other side of the mountain cause you suffering? Is the end of suffering going to be found on the other side of the mountain? Well, no, you're just the bear that goes over the mountain, to see what he could see. What does he see? The other side of the mountain. That's it. Is the dirt on the other side of the mountain different from the dirt over here? Are the rocks there different from the rocks here?

The first month I came back to the States and settled down in Wat Metta, a group of lay people had organized a trip for the monks to go to Yellowstone. I didn't go along. Ajaan Suwat went with a couple of the monks who were visiting from Thailand. When they came back, I asked him, was there anything in their trip that impressed him? He said, he hadn't see anything new. It was all inconstancy all over again: things that are inconstant, things that are stressful, things that are not-self. Rocks change, water changes. When you look outside, that's all you see. It doesn't really teach any lessons that you don't learn by looking inside.

When you look inside, then you see something else. You see the intentions of the mind, the activity of the mind, because that's where the suffering comes from. It doesn't come from your body—although the mind can create a lot of suffering around the body. The body gets sick, you get upset. The body is growing old, you

get upset. The body is getting ready to die, you feel abandoned, you feel betrayed. It's not as if the body made a pact with you. It didn't sign an agreement that it was going to look after you and respond to all the good things you do for it. It just does its own body thing. It develops for a while and then it starts falling apart.

And the body's not suffering. It's the *mind* that's suffering around the body. This is why we explore the body. Go through all the parts the body, as in the chant just now. One by one by one, what in there is something that's really worth sacrificing everything else for? There's nothing. Each part has a function, and that's what it's good for. It's good for functioning in a certain way. Then the question is, what are you going to do with this functioning body? You could get attached to it, but that creates suffering.

This is why we have the chant on the 32 parts, to remind ourselves not to get too obsessed with the body, not to think that the body in and of itself is going to provide you with true happiness.

But this doesn't mean the body's a bad thing that you've got to do away with. You learn to use it as a tool. When you sit in meditation, the body will help you sit. When you do walking meditation, the body will help you. It'll give you something to contemplate or something to use as a foundation for the mind as you settle down. You find that there's a potential for rapture right here, just in the way you breathe, the way you approach the breath, the way you approach your experience of having a body. You can pull things this way and that, and drag them here, drag them there, but that doesn't create rapture. Allow the body to be still, and really still as you breathe. Allow there to be the least amount of fabrication possible as you breathe in and breathe out. See what happens.

You'll find that the body has a potential for creating a sense of fullness, a sense of rapture. You can't take that as an end in and of itself, but it is part of the path. As you settle in with that, then you can start exploring other things as well, all the themes that the Buddha talked about, both in terms of the qualities you want to develop as a meditator right here, and the themes you might want to contemplate right here. If you want to see the four noble truths, you can see them right here, in the way the mind relates to the body. If you want to see the three characteristics, you can find them right here as well.

Ajaan Maha Boowa's analogy is the body as a city, with streets and buildings. The four-way intersections are the four noble truths; the three-way intersections, the three characteristics. Everything you need to know is right here. All the tools you need for the knowing, to help you know, are right here as well. It's just that you haven't spent enough time exploring the body. You're distracted by things outside, all the pretty things of the world. You can think about how, if you spend

a lot of money, you can go here, go there—see the spectacular mountains at the southern tip of South America, the fjords of Norway. And because it costs so much money to go there, you think it must be amazing. Well, when you go there, what you see? You see rock, you see water. They have their different shapes, but still it's just rock, it's just water. And if by going there, you could put an end to suffering, it would be worth going. But that kind of exploring doesn't put an end of the itch in the mind.

We tend to be like a mangy dog. The mangy dog lies down next a tree, and its skin itches. It blames to the tree and goes off to a wall, lies down next to the wall. Its skin still itches, so it blames the wall. Everywhere it goes, there's mangy skin, so it blames wherever it's been. Of course, the problem is not with the tree or the wall or the bushes or anything it lies next to, the problem is in its own skin. Because it takes its mange wherever it goes, it's going to itch wherever it goes.

We've got mange in our own minds, so if we want to cure the problem, we have to cure right here. And the big cause for the mange is just this: how we relate to our own bodies.

So try to explore here. Get to know your inside territory. Once you know your inside territory, then if you a need to go someplace else outside, you're taking good things along with you. You're taking the concentration and discernment and mindfulness that you've been developing. That all goes with you. Then all the potential for insight goes with you as well because you've done your inner exploration first.

So if you're going to wander or travel, wander and travel here in your body. Because that's that kind of wandering that actually takes your mind someplace. It has a goal. It's an exploration that actually comes to an end. When you come to the end of suffering, you've really accomplish something.

If you wander just wander in the outside world, what do you accomplished?

I know someone who has spent his whole life ever since he got out of college wandering around the world. We get postcards from him every now and then: a bicycle trip through India, a bicycle trip through Laos, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, but it never comes to an end. While he's on one trip, he's planning the next trip. In this case, it's just a matter of running away from what's inside the mind. And no matter where you go, you can't run away from that. So you might as well turn around and deal with what's inside the mind, cure the mange, understand what causes it, explore that issue. Once that issue's been explored and dealt with, then you can go wherever you want with no itchiness at all.