



Stay With The Breath, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Put aside your old ways of using your eyes and ears and nose, tongue, body, and mind to focus on issues outside there in the world, to get your knowledge about the world, to figure out how to gain what you want out of the world – and of course getting complacent and careless when you get what you want, and upset when you don't, and trying to find new ways of getting it. Now we want to use our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind for other purposes, just to see the processes of the senses as they happen, in and of themselves. Look at them in a way that highlights the movements of the mind, how the mind makes a choice, and how it enforces that choice, how it justifies that choice to itself.

All these processes are going on all the time, but we usually don't look at them because our attention is focused somewhere else far away. So stay right here at the breath, because this is a great place to observe all these other things. The Buddha makes a comparison to six kinds of animals. If you tie them all to leashes and tie the leashes together, the animals will all pull in their various directions to feed. The crocodile will want to go down to feed in the river, the monkey will want to go climb up to feed in the tree, the hyena will want to go to feed in a charnel ground, and so on. Depending on which animal is the strongest, the others get dragged along.

But if you tie them all to an immovable post, then no matter how hard they pull, they all end up staying right there at the post. The post here is mindfulness immersed in the body. The prime way of immersing mindfulness in the body is to be mindful of the breath. When you stay with the breath, you can detect the pull that goes out the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind to past and future, to your likes and dislikes. But you don't have to give in to that pull because you've got a place where you can stay grounded and secure. [...]

These things are all here to be observed. They're all happening all the time. But to see them we have to change our focus. To change our focus requires a change of heart, telling ourselves that this really is important, much more important than things outside. That's what conviction is all about. Appropriate attention is the change of focus; conviction, the change of heart. You make up your mind – and your heart – that this is an important issue that's got to be resolved, and this is the way to do it.