

“Whatever the experience, there needs to be a reflective awareness able to return to the heart of the matter and see what is actually going on.”



Yogi Mind

From a talk given by Ajahn Thanasanti

After several days on retreat we can see what the result of the practice is. We can observe the effect of mindfulness, attention, a life style of simplicity, restraint; moral integrity and hours of meditation with some Dhamma input each day. We can see what our minds and our bodies are like and notice some change from what they were like when we first arrived.

There's a certain pattern noticeable on the retreats I've been on. People come and they're often relieved to be here, but they're still very much carrying the burden and weight of the world they've left behind. The first few days are a combination of frustration, pain, confusion, tiredness, dreariness and dread mixed with good will, right intention and effort.

Characteristically, the faces are long and drawn, and the energy is thick and heavy and people are doing their best to be good yogis. But the feeling is one of 'me,' 'my' pain, 'my' problem, 'my' dilemmas, 'my' poor practice, and 'my' painful knees. It shows in people's faces and is obvious in the quality of the energy in the room. You can feel it.

After some time there's a little bit of perspective.

The quality of stillness becomes more tangible. People's faces begin to lighten and brighten. Then the whole 'me/my' universe begins to soften and we begin to wake up to realise there are actually other people in the universe. In fact, they're sitting right next to us. Then, as the mind begins to become more still and more focused, we experience what is commonly known as "yogi mind."

"Yogi mind" is a focused and concentrated mind, which like a magnifying glass doesn't only magnify the pretty things. It magnifies everything. So the pretty things and the not so pretty things are equally magnified and become more recognisable, more visible, more exposed.

One of the characteristics of "yogi mind" is the capacity to get obsessed with the minutest detail, to hate — all of a sudden — the person sitting next to you because of the way they're breathing. Or to be utterly convinced that the entire suffering of the universe is the result of the way this one person is walking in and out of the door. Or various forms of war take place between those who want one particular use of a room and people who want another use of the room. Then, there's the opposite — the 'vipassana romance.' You've finally found the beloved you've been dreaming of. They're sitting a few seats away from you. You're convinced they have the same feeling about you. It's obvious by the way they're doing their walking meditation.

"Yogi mind" focuses and concentrates emotions, feelings and mental tendencies that are present or latent in conscious awareness. These things just become bigger

than they normally would or different to how we normally experience them. Little things take on grand proportions. Projection is the important aspect in understanding “yogi mind.” The intention of mental proliferation is aimed at getting what we want or getting rid of what we don’t want. The problem or the answer is seen to be outside of us.

Meditation and a retreat environment causes increased energy. When there is an ability to use that energy to bring awareness and attention to the nature of desire, aversion and the way fantasies are used to bypass problems or seek the answer outside of ourselves, then yogi mind becomes a useful tool for learning. One uses the process as a way to come to terms with the mind.

I remember once doing a long retreat at IMS in Barre, Massachusetts. I had come with three different pairs of shoes — ‘Rambo’-type mountain climbing-boots, a pair of wooden clogs, and a pair of shoes that had straw soles. As long as the weather was dry and there wasn’t snow on the ground, I used to wear the straw soled shoes all over the place because they would work well inside and they would work well outside.

Then, it started raining. Then, it started snowing. It took the straw-soled shoes three days to dry out once they got wet. I couldn’t bear to keep putting on and taking off my ‘Rambo’ mountain boots with their 25 eyelets, so I would just put on the wooden clogs.

Well, the meditation center at IMS has wooden floors. Unbeknownst to me, most of those present were

convinced I had a sadistic urge to torture everyone, that it was an intentional and completely sadistic thing to be doing using these wooden clogs during the walking meditation. A warfare of notes on the bulletin board took place.

The retreat manager, being skilful, intervened. She saw some of these notes plastered on the bulletin boards aimed at this sadistic yogi who was determined to torture everyone.

She removed the notes before I had a chance to see them so that I didn't have to deal with the effect of having to read such things. She came to me to find out what was going on. I explained to her the situation was that I just had these three pairs of shoes and the wooden clogs were the only ones I could use.

I left a little note on the bulletin board asking if anyone had a pair of shoes I could borrow. The next time I went down to check there were no less than ten pairs of shoes that somehow all fit my feet exactly and would be quiet on the wooden floors.

For me it was an interesting learning. For one it was illuminating to see how insensitive and lacking mindfulness I could be to wear wooden clogs on a wooden floor. Equally illuminating was to see what happens when we become, intentionally or not, the object of someone else's aversion or desire.

Such is the way with "yogi mind." Because the mind is concentrated, it takes things and it gets very convinced about the absolute rightness of the perception.

But often there isn't a lot of wisdom, discrimination or equanimity. And these qualities of discrimination and equanimity are ones that need to be cultivated. Whatever the experience, there needs to be a reflective awareness able to return to the heart of the matter and see what is actually going on. It's important not to get caught in the appearance of things or carried by the tide of emotion so much so that the capacity to reflect is lost. It can be useful to ask, whatever is going on, "Where is the suffering? What is the cause? Is it 'out there' or in my relationship with what I am experiencing?" To ask, "Does the world really need to be different and give me what I want in order to be content and feel at ease?" It is important to wake up to these things and see them as just another view, another thought, another habit of mind that is constantly being enacted without checking if by doing so the desired result is ever produced.

So if you have experienced such things, just rest assured that this is an utterly normal part of meditation and it's nothing to be distressed about. But it is something to open up to, to look at closely and not to be fooled by or believed in.

When the passions of the mind are saying, "This is not just an opinion, this is ABSOLUTELY TRUE" you have your signal, your red flag. Anything that presents itself as absolute truth, is a sign to look at. Check into it. Feel the screaming mind. Take a look at what's going on. There's usually attachment, often a lot of fear. Anger or self-righteousness can be a mask of many things

including fear. All of this is very good to notice, to open up to, to look at, and to have a sense of the way the mind operates in its peaceful as well as its non-peaceful moments.

It is important to learn about the movements of mind so that they no longer confuse or deceive us, to let the awareness of all experience take us to the still heart. In that way, regardless of what we are experiencing, pleasant or unpleasant, there is the contentment that comes from abiding in awareness. This contentment is worth cultivating.

