

Practice Notes: Leading and Following

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To say a few words about the practice that might support you this morning, there's a concept in meditation or mindfulness distinguished between what leads and what follows. So, an example would be, there's a glass of water here in front of me, which is very nice. And I might be thinking, well, there might not be a glass of water in the conference room. I'm going to be talking with six people. I wonder how thirsty I'll get. Yeah, you know, it's hard to know.

Maybe I should check the temperature in the room and calculate how hot it is and how that's going to affect my thirst. And maybe I should plan ahead. So I think I'll drink some. I don't feel thirsty now, but I should drink some just so it'd be better later. So now what's taking the lead is all this thought, all this logic and planning ahead. And maybe behind that, what's pushing that might be fear, might be wisdom, or who knows. But that's what's taking the lead.

If I'm sitting here and I feel thirsty, and allow the thirst to guide the direction, then I might, based on the thirst, say, yeah, there's water. It's a good time to drink. And so the thirst takes the lead. So when we're doing meditation, like sitting meditation, what takes the lead? Is it your mind? Is it your mind?

It might be your mind is so much taking the lead that it's pulling you into thought trains that have nothing to do with here and now. You're off in Timbuktu with your thoughts, and you've been led away by it. And our mind leads us away, our thinking mind leads us away quite often. And that's in charge, that's taking the lead. And poor you just has to follow. You know, almost like you don't have a choice. You're just like, off you go. And there's not much freedom in that. There's not much choice.

And so in meditation, you want to find a way that something more meaningful can lead and you follow. And one is that you can follow something physical. And one of the reasons we do

focus on breathing is we let the breathing take the lead. And that's like thirst. It's not exactly like thirst, but it's a physical sensation.

And you tune into that physical sensation, and it's a physical sensation that has a rhythmic quality to it. Different sensations come into play as you breathe in, different as you breathe out. There might be a rising of the chest or the belly as you breathe in, a falling of it as it goes away, as you exhale. And so if you make that take the lead, and the mind follows, and even if you have to think, even your thinking kind of is concerned, like, how nice, look at that, I'm with the breathing, that's an inhale, that's an exhale, you know, so it keeps you right there, but you get a kind of a somatic difference between following the lead of the body, this wonderful kind of flow, this movement.

If you're doing walking meditation, for example, then the sensations of the feet, the same kind of, in a similar kind of way in which there's a rhythm, an alternation of sensations that come into play as you walk. The alternation of sensations in the beginning of the step and the ending of the step. The left and the right have differences, you know, you're moving back and forth. So you let the stepping take the lead and the mind follows.

And if you can let the mind really follow and not lead you away, then the mind begins to relax. The mind starts, is not so inclined to take the lead. Of course it'll do that. You'll say, well, that was a terrible left step. I hope no one noticed. You know, who am I to make a left step like that? And now your mind has started taking the lead.

But you say, no, no, just gently, no, no, come on, let's let the step take the lead. And let's have the mind attention follow. Let's let the attention follow. And what's going on, rather than the mind directing the attention to different things, the attention is follow. And so this can begin to allow things to relax and to settle.

In that reactive mind, the preoccupying mind, the planning mind, the figuring things out mind, the storytelling mind, that's where a lot of the stress and tension builds up. And if that has a chance to relax, then you can get into kind of a meditative state. And so you might see as you meditate today, if you have the mind follow rather than the mind lead. Follow breathing, follow stepping, and see what happens. Okay? Thank you.