

Go and sit with it!

the Monopoly of the mind

A popular advice to give anyone who presents a problem is: “Maybe you should go and sit with it for a while”.

Was it not Blaise Pascal who wrote:

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability
to sit quietly in a room alone"? ¹

Being at mercy of his wandering mind, all kinds of uncomfortable questions and feelings may arise from unsolved business and difficult predicaments.

But what does it actually mean, this “sitting” and how should one do this?

How not to Sit

If “sit with it” means: think it over and ponder about it as long as you can in order to figure it out, I would say I never do this and don’t advise it to any one. Not if applied to subjects like “the future, my relationship, feelings about or from myself”. These are not for the mind to solve. It would be totally overwhelmed by it and would produce only non-sensical (but smart-sounding!) words and thoughts that would lead you astray even further. Setting up your self or others to do this, will result in just this: you (they) will be “upset”. It causes turmoil for nothing.

Questions like these don’t belong to the mind, but to the heart. And by this I don’t mean the realm of feelings (they are mind too, pushing the buttons of the body), but the unknowable realm of everything that happens naturally on which we have no real influence. We only hurt ourselves if we pretend we do. The only wise attitude to these happenings is trust life, listen to intuition and spontaneity and be amazed what miraculously happens. Surrender to it.

¹ **Blaise Pascal** (1623 – 1662), *Pensées* (1670), from no XXVII, *Misère de l'homme*: “J’ai souvent dit, que tout le malheur des hommes vient de ne savoir pas se tenir en repos dans une chambre. Un homme qui a assez de bien pour vivre, s’il avait demeuré chez soi”.



Another meaning of “sit with it” can be: do zazen sitting meditation. In this case it would mean accepting there is nothing you can do about it, nothing the mind can solve, and just calm your mind, observe the thoughts passing by without wanting to reach any goal or solution with this. So even then you can’t go and do meditation “about” some predetermined subject. That is not how it works. It is not about holding on to a thought, but about the exact opposite: letting it go. Thoughts are not reality, they are abstract. *Ceci n’est pas une pipe (remember the famous painting?²)*.

You can’t quench your thirst with the thought of water. Sure you can try sitting with specific thoughts, but it will amount to nothing. Sitting with an illusion only produces new illusions.

So what *can* you do?

Sit with yourself, nothing to obtain

You can only sit with yourself. You just sit and observe your random thoughts, and when they calm down and/or you don’t react to them anymore you hope to come closer to the one who you really are and find liberation and peace – freedom from the mind. The only thing you can obtain with this is the insight that there is nothing to obtain. There is only reality and you are it already, you can not obtain it. This will produce liberation and a sense of peace as a pleasant by-product, but only if you don’t aim for this. If you do aim, you will get only the thought of peace, not the real thing.

Most people who start "sitting" with themselves, whether they call it meditation or not, get scared of all the thoughts that seem to be so pronounced suddenly, when no distraction is available to cover them up. And then they give up and say that meditation is not for them. Here some perseverance and subtle listening will pay off, just as with training the body. And the catch is to notice that most of these thoughts are about fictional situations that are not happening now, most likely they will never happen. Thoughts are about thoughts, not about reality. In any case, if you sit with a thought without engaging, without combining with it, without taking it personally, you will be surprised how short-lived and not-relevant it is.

After a while you will see that almost all thoughts are only suggestions of the mind, saying things like "how about getting angry now? Or sad? Or desperate? Or happy?". The mind doesn’t know what it is suggesting, it has no agenda. It just knows what made you jump before and tries if this happens again. It is conditioned and conditioning. It means no harm but it is mostly not for your benefit either. It leads to meaningless repetition of known patterns and a lot of trouble and effort.

This is just what the mind does. It is like a runny nose. Only it produces thoughts, not booger. The trick is to realize that there is an option here. You could simply sit with the suggestion, notice it, look at it, without being swept away by it. You could either answer the call of the

² **René Magritte** (1898 – 1967), the famous Belgian surrealist painter, created this painting, originally known as “La Trahison des images” (the deception of images) in 1928/29. It belongs to the collection of the Los Angeles County museum of Art. There is also his 1964 painting with the same message, called “Ceci n’ est pas une pomme” (“This is no apple”).

mind, or not. If you do this for a prolonged time, you will notice it gets ever more easy to not answer the call, and that in most of those cases you are much better off in the end, because life has moved on autonomously in a direction that was unforeseen without you having to do anything about it. And the second thing you will notice is that the mind learns not to produce so many thoughts anymore. It wants attention. If it doesn't get it, it will do another trick. If none of its tricks seem to work anymore, it will reside. Nature will not waste costly energy for nothing in the long run.

So by all means, sit with yourself. Without any purpose. Just for the sake of sitting itself. Nothing will scare or hurt you if you realize that none of what the mind will produce is actually really about you.

Posture and Monopoly – the end of the illusion

Sitting like this does not need a posture. I sit with myself all day long, whatever I do. However, due to circumstances regarding my health, I find myself in a sitting position twice a day for about 3 hours combined since I was 30 years old, and these are often the most quiet in the day. I have done over 30.000 hours of quietness in this way during my life so far. That taught my mind a serious lesson: its content is completely illusory, abstract. It has nothing to do with reality as it is. At best it produces an inadequate model of reality that never turns out to be true.

Then I found out that life as perceived before, was the mind's game of Monopoly with thoughts as its currency – and I was just a pawn between other pawns, thinking this was real – trying to get to the riches of the game and suffering from the emotions of loss and gain. The currency (thoughts) was phony money and worth nothing in reality. Had I not seen thru this, this would have been my life until time (also an illusion) would just have called the game quits and closed the box on it, putting it away as if nothing had happened. We call this death.

After seeing thru this, I just suddenly found myself outside the game. It is like the game only played in a little room, and it just disappeared, it stopped, including the money and the pawns. No more 'I' and "others", no more thoughts, only the direct experience of what is. Unknowable but very real – in stead of "the known" but very phony game that kept me in the little room, separated from reality.

So be careful when you start sitting with (what you think is) yourself. You might disappear. It is great. And also very common because it is what was already there before. Nothing changes and everything.



Mind you, it doesn't need 30.000 hours of sitting. It just needs seeing thru the illusion. This can happen in a moment. You actually can not even train it. It is much more a not-doing. Something stops happening. The monopoly game. You can still the mind and look at it for a long time, but when and if the seeing-thru happens is not in your control. It is like the famous optical illusion of the Rubin vase and the two faces. First you

only see one of them. Suddenly something “clicks” inside and you see the whole picture. You can never not see it again.

Likewise, when seeing thru the mind, you can't go back nor will you ever want to. It is like not believing in Santa Claus³ anymore. You don't get the little gifts once a year anymore (or if you still do, it will be a play), but only one real gift permanently: reality and life itself.

Nothing compares to that.

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³ More about this intuition in Tale no. 16 (*The Santa-Clausness of Life*).