

Fascination

Alan Zundel speaking at the Heart Awake Center, April 18th 2007

www.heartawake.org

“Did you find the music downstairs distracting?”

[voices answering, “no,” “not that we noticed,” etc.]

“Okay. But I was going to mention that sometimes that kind of thing can be a good meditation practice. To try to just let the sound be, without getting caught into it or find yourself resisting and resenting the intrusion. It’s particularly hard not to get drawn into the sound of human voices or music. A lot of other things you can get used to, like the sound of the cars outside or the crackling of the heater as it heats up, but music and voices just have a tendency to to draw your attention, to draw you attention in.

“And like other evenings I’m going to talk about the drawing of the attention in and drawing of the attention out. I’ve talked in the past about detachment; I want to talk about that in a slightly different way tonight. To talk about the opposite of detachment, but not the opposite of detachment being attachment, rather the opposite of detachment being fascination. Fascination. What is fascination? What does it mean to be fascinated by something?”

[voices replying]

“Caught up in. Interested. Your attention is drawn into it, right? Becomes focused on that, to the point where it shuts other things out. So one of the things that draw our attention is human voices and music. You can be fascinated by music, by something of beauty, beauty or intricacy—kind of gives you a sense of awe. Beautiful things you can be fascinated by, particularly faces of people that you love—a child’s face, your children, your parents, a loved one, your intimate partner. When you look at their face you become fascinated looking at it, right? Fascinated—just drawn into it, and other things tend to drop away and you get caught up in it. You can even get caught up in the face of a stranger, a beautiful stranger. Or a person with an interesting face, maybe a face full of character, and you can become fascinated just looking at them. In fact, I think that’s a big part of the reason that people go to the movies is to look at nice looking people. It draws your attention. It draws your attention.

“Intricate things like in nature. Oh, you see an animal—an insect, look at an insect up close and you say ‘oh, that’s fascinating! Look at how it moves, how different it is, how it’s put together. How could God do something like this, even *conceive* of it, put it together, make it work.’ You get drawn into it, your attention gets drawn into it. Your attention gets drawn down to focus on that object.

“Another kind of fascination, though, is the opposite pole. Rather than beauty and intricacy, you can become fascinated by things that are frightening or grotesque or unusual. The familiar rubbernecking on the freeway when you drive by—what are people looking for? Well, one thing they’re fascinated by is the damage to the vehicles, right? But truthfully, usually you’re looking to see a person who’s been hurt. You’re fascinated by that, by seeing people that might be hurt. There’s not only the sympathy element and the desire to help, but just the fascination with the reality of vulnerability and people being damaged.

“We become fascinated by people that have deformities. We try not to look at them, it’s impolite, but it’s easy to have your attention drawn to that. Maybe a person with a missing limb or something asymmetrical about their face; you know, they’ve had a scar from an operation or an accident or something, and it draws your attention in. You don’t want to stare but you feel like your attention gets drawn to it, and when you think no one’s looking you take that second glance just to see it. For what reason I don’t know, but it draws you in. Or somebody that’s unusually big or unusually small or anything that’s out of the ordinary, you become fascinated; it just pulls you in. Pulls you in.

“What most people become the most fascinated by, though, in my view, is their own thoughts and feelings. They pull you in, they draw your attention and your interest the same way. Your focus narrows down to that, when you start paying attention to it. And it’s similar to being fascinated by things of beauty, or things that are frightening or grotesque to us in some way.

“The emotions tend to be more on the grotesque side. We become fascinated by our emotions when they’re what you might call negative emotions. Things like resentful states of mind, anxious states of mind—when we’re down on ourselves, when we’re feeling depressed and low or when we’re feeling very bad about ourselves or something in our lives, or something in our character. There’s that tendency to become fascinated by that feeling, almost like when you’re looking at an insect on the window sill and you want to, ‘oh, isn’t that interesting!’ That feeling becomes a focus of fascination and you find your attention being drawn to it. It’s like you have a chest full of interesting things, like when you were a kid, you had a little—I had a cigar box and I’d keep marbles that were all clear, of different colors, or different things that I had found, and keep it under the bed and pull it out and open it and get fascinated, and other people would be like, ‘What is that junk? What do you want with that?’ But it fascinated *me*. Our emotions are like that. To other people it’s a junk state of mind when they see you in it, but when *you’re* in it it’s a different story. You feel like, ‘oh, this is just so interesting.’ Your attention gets drawn into it, you want to kind of perpetuate it and immerse yourself in it: ‘gee, I feel so bad’ or ‘gee, I’m so worried,’ or any one of a number of emotions that are similar to those. You become fascinated by it; you become drawn into it.

“On the side of beauty and intricacy there’s our thoughts. In our lives we become very familiar with our thoughts and we take the time to try and build a system of beliefs that make sense to us. We collect ideas from different places, things that seem to resonate or even things that have that intricate beauty in the way they’re built. A philosophy of life that really seems to hold together and make sense and has balance and proportion or something, and it can fascinate you. So you take it into your mind and then you draw it out to look at it, to look at the world through that. ‘Oh, this is the way the world is; these are my thoughts on it.’ All this is fascinating, so fascinating you want to tell other people about it. It kind of offends you when they don’t want to hear about it or—you know you’re *really* fascinated by your thoughts when you express them and other people challenge them and you find yourself getting upset. But it’s just a thought, right? This is your belief, the best judgment that you’ve come to about how the world is, what’s going on, and you express it and someone disagrees with you, you find yourself getting defensive, or getting resentful, or closing that person off in some way. You become focused in on that belief, you want to protect that precious belief against challenge and the other person becomes more of an enemy or a stranger to you because they don’t share that belief, or they don’t appreciate the beauty of it the way that you do. So we become fascinated by the beliefs that we pick up, by our thoughts, by our ideas about what life’s about or who we are or what other people are like, and we don’t like that to be challenged, we don’t like that to be taken away or trivialized or made light of.

“To be fascinated by the elements of our mind like that, emotions and thoughts, is a state of self hypnosis. That fascination is the same thing that’s meant by being asleep. The more fascinated we are by it the more deeply we are asleep, the more deeply we are in a state of hypnosis, mesmerized by that emotion or that thought. It’s so compelling, it’s so attractive to us that we get stuck in it, that we lose our sense of what we really are. We’re something more than that thought or emotion. That’s going to pass, that’s going to change. The emotion eventually dissipates. It may come back; especially if it’s particularly fascinating to you, you won’t lose any opportunity to bring it back and look at it again and stick in it for awhile. [*laughs*] Your beliefs eventually change, even though you can defend them and try to hold on to them because you think they’re so interesting, so well put together. But eventually life moves on and you find your beliefs changing. Some challenge maybe, or some other belief replaces it or causes you to alter it. So these things do change, they’re not who we *are*, but we’re so fascinated by them we become identified with them and stuck on them. We lose the barrier between who we *are* and what we feel or what we believe, and we become drawn right into it and everything else drops away and that’s all that becomes important.

“So it’s that sense of being able to draw *out* of it, to become less fascinated, to become less immersed in a thought or feeling—that’s the process of waking up. To sense that distance between the totality of ourselves and this limited part of ourselves that is a thought or belief or a feeling. These changeable parts of ourselves *are* parts of ourselves, but they’re only *parts* of ourselves. The totality of ourselves is something so much more open. The openness to everything, the openness to all that’s around you and to all your

perceptions, all of your feelings, all the possible thoughts that come through. You know that fascination is losing its hold when you feel that these emotions come up and you no longer feel that you have to hold it there and linger in it and play with it; you're not so fascinated by it. It comes up, you recognize that 'oh, I'm feeling a little down, but let's go on with life and eventually it will go away.' Or your beliefs—you find you express a belief and someone says, 'well that's not true at all, I don't believe that,' and you're not angry. You're not upset. You just listen to what they have to say and you consider what they have to say. You may change your mind or you may not, but you don't feel defensive about it. So the fascination's not there. The idea's there, but the idea's something you can let go of; you're not identified with it.

“So meditating on something while the distractions come and go is good because it gives you that practice of not allowing yourself to be drawn in, of letting things be. Human voices can be so compelling, but when you hear that voice you just let it be. You don't have to be drawn into it. Pulling back from it; pulling back from it. Letting it be. You do the same thing in yourself. When your voice inside your head is expressing beliefs, just pull back a little bit; you let it be. You allow it to be without being drawn into it, without being stuck on it—without holding on to it. So fascination, it's another word, another way of describing attachment. The goal of detachment then is to not negate these things but to become less fascinated by them so you can open yourself up. Your focus expands; rather than being narrowed down to something it opens up. And you have the ability to open up or narrow down, without being stuck at that single focus.”

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