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Policing

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Policing

I learned as a high school student that being sent to “police” the yard did not mean to act like a police officer, but to pick up trash. When we finished policing the yard, the pavement was clean, and the garbage cans then held what should have been placed in them in the first place. Though I did not like picking up rubbish after careless students, I could appreciate that a school yard should be kept clean. In San Francisco, if garbage was left on the ground, seagulls would swoop in and tear bags apart and create an even bigger mess, which included their own “deposits.”

Policing our minds, by picking out the thoughts that do not belong there and placing them in the trash-bin of conscious rejection is a very healthy procedure. No one appoints us to this task, and it might appear to be a completely individual kind of work, even though we know that the results of a clearer mind will benefit everyone around us. But, because we are not commanded to bring better order to the kinds of thoughts that occupy our minds, we might let the yard become rather unsightly before we come to realize that others, like seagulls, have begun to add their own lines of disordered thinking to ours.

If we entertain the thought that the task of policing our minds is too difficult, we have just identified one thought that belongs in the trash, with the lid closed on top so that we will not catch another whiff of the bad odor. We humans, material and spiritual at the same time, can, with ordinary efforts, make choices even about which thoughts to approve and which to leave aside. And in all our choosing, no matter how instantaneously we act, the Spirit of inspiration is always within us, available, and willing to help. Our minds are our own, but we are not alone, even in our thinking.

The way we relate thinking, considering, pondering, and imagining to our actions is not like the many other functions of our bodies, such as blood circulation which is almost entirely autonomous. Though we cannot directly control our heart rate, we can take immediate and direct control of our thoughts, and in doing so, not only decide upon direct bodily actions such as walking or talking, but also those which bring about changes in some of our internal physical processes. Fearful thoughts constrict our blood vessels and raise our heart rates. Angry thoughts tighten our muscles and also increase our heart rates. Peaceful thoughts release tension in our muscles, and our hearts beat more slowly.

But the most significant part of policing our minds involves those thoughts that influence our guiding, habitual attitudes. For example, if we frequently entertain negative thoughts about others, or even ourselves, we attract

persons with the same propensity, thereby increasing the ugly and unhealthy state of our inner yard. Some thoughts, no matter how "true," are still "garbage" for us, serving no good purpose. When we choose to think, in another example, about how God loves us, or about the positive values we want to put into action, our immediate feelings are affected, but, more importantly, our present and future actions match with our ideals.

Policing our minds is not for the sake of appearances, though our habitual lines of thought are in some manner revealed in our faces and bodily stance. But who we are, and who we wish to become, depends greatly on the kinds of thoughts we choose for ourselves.