

## *Meditate Because You Have To*

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Your attitude to meditation should be the same as your attitude toward eating, in the sense that it's something you do every day. When you eat, you don't ask yourself how much longer you have to keep on eating, or why your body isn't getting better and better all the time as you eat. You have to eat regardless because the body needs it. And as for how long the body is going to live and how healthy it's going to get, part of it has to do with the eating and part of it has to do with other factors that lie beyond your control. So you keep on eating. You try to eat well in the sense of eating in whatever way is best for your body. And it doesn't matter whether you feel like eating or don't feel like eating. When the body is hungry, you eat.

In the same way, when your mind is hungry, it needs training. It needs to be fed with good food, the food provided by the breath, by mindfulness and alertness, by all the qualities that count as causes in the meditation.

This is one of the principles you hear again and again and again from the ajaans. They say you meditate when you feel like it, and you meditate when you don't feel like it. You can't let your likes or dislikes get in the way. It's just something you do. It's something the mind needs. And as for how fast the progress is coming, or whether it seems to go up and down, that's just a natural part of the mind.

So when frustration comes up, you sit with it. When enthusiasm comes up, you sit with it. Whatever comes up, you sit with it. You watch it. You learn from it. There's a sutta where a prince comes to see a monk and asks him, "Is it really true that you can get someplace with the meditation? Because it seems to me that whether you want results or don't want results, I don't think it's going to get anywhere. Whether you establish a wish or don't establish a wish, you're not going to get anywhere." The monk responds that the wishing or not wishing is irrelevant. What matters is that you take care of the causes, and the causes will take care of the results.

The same goes for hoping. The same goes for whether you expect the meditation to go well or to go poorly. You've probably had this experience many times. You think it's going to be great. "I've got an opportunity to meditate. I've got all this time," yet it doesn't go well. Other times, you think "Oh, this won't be good." But for some reason, when you actually do sit down and meditate, you find that it goes well.

So you can't let your expectations be the measure; you can't let your hopes or lack of hopes be the measure. The measure is whether you sit down and create what you know are good causes. You stick with each breath. As for how quickly the results are going to come, you say, "Don't ask." "Why aren't we getting there right now?" "Don't ask." "How soon are we going to arrive?" "Don't ask." Like the questions kids keep asking: "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" You don't get there faster by asking, "Are we there yet?" You just keep driving and ultimately you arrive. As for whether you're feeling patient or impatient, you just keep driving.

Ajaan Maha Boowa has that passage where he talks about how, in his early days as a meditator, his meditation would go through cycles. It'd go well for a couple days and then, as he said, it would crash. Defilements would take over his mind. Then he was able to gather his forces again and it would start going well again. But then it would crash again. He could anticipate that there was certain time period that seemed to go in cycles. But he finally realized that the only way to get out of the cycles was not to anticipate anything, just do what you know you're supposed to do. In his case, he would stay with his meditation word. You can stay with the breath, or whatever your topic of concentration is. And instead of trying to keep one eye on what landmarks you're passing, or whether the goal seems to be coming into sight, or whether it seems to be receding away, you just focus on what you're doing.

This is the best way to interpret that statement that the goal is in the path. In other words, you don't keep one eye in the path and one eye out scanning for the goal. You just keep focused on the path. When the goal is going to come, it's going to come without any forewarning. But it's going to appear right at this point where you're paying full attention to the path, where you're putting together all the right causes, being mindful to stay with the breath, being alert to how the breath feels all the way in, all the way out, this breath and then this breath and then this breath. Each breath. Treat each breath as worthy of your full attention, and not as something you have to get past to get someplace else, to get to the end of the hour, or get to the end of the path.

It's in your alertness to each breath: That's where things are going to appear. Because as you're alert to the breath, you start getting more and more alert to the mind. Otherwise all you see are your anticipations, all you see are your expectations, without seeing the movements of the mind in the present moment. The more you're focused on the breath, the more you can guarantee you're right here in the present moment. You can begin to see the movements of the mind around the breath. You're not going to find them anywhere else.

As the Buddha said, we're here to learn about *sankhara*, the process of fabrication, and what fabrications do you need to know? Well, there's bodily fabrication, which is the in-and-out breath. That's right here. Verbal fabrication, directed thoughts and evaluation: That's right here as well. You're directing your thoughts to the breath and you're evaluating the breath. Each breath. If you have a breath that doesn't feel all that satisfactory, ask yourself, "What kind of breath would feel more satisfactory?" and see how the body responds. One at a time, one at a time.

Then there's mental fabrication: feelings and perceptions. The perceptions here are the perceptions you hold in mind to stay with the breath, your images of what the breathing is like. When you breathe in, where does the breath energy come in? Where doesn't it come in? You can play with that to see how the perception of the breath alters the way you breathe and then you notice the feelings that arise: feelings of pleasure, feelings of discomfort. Even the slightest little bit of stress, you don't want. Keep holding that ideal in mind that you want really smooth breathing all the way in, smooth all the way out, breathing with a sense that there's no obstacle at all. The breath energy just wants to come into the body. All you have to do is let it come in. You don't have to force it. You don't have to pull it in or squeeze it out. Allow it to do its stuff.

And now, here you are. You've got all these forms of fabrication. They're all happening right here. This is all you need to know. As for where all this is going to go, you don't have to anticipate it. Notice, this is not a ninefold path with right anticipation someplace in there. You've got right mindfulness, right effort, right concentration. Those are the factors that you're working on right now. You're building on all the other factors of the path, starting with right view, the purpose of which is to keep you focused right here right now. That's all you have to worry about.

Then you do it again and you do it again. Stay right here continuously. If find yourself slipping off, just bring yourself back. As for all the chatter that goes on in the mind, asking, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" just let it go, let it go. Your only duty is to get the factors, to get the causes right. And you just keep on doing that, just like you keep on eating: because it's something you have to do.

When the causes are right, when they're really right, then they start to give results you wouldn't expect. You can paint pictures for yourself as what the results might be like, when things finally come together, but the pictures have very little to do with the actual results. This is why the Buddha talks so little in the Canon about nibbana, and talks so much about the path. He talks about nibbana just enough to give you encouragement. And he warns you about the things that can

come up if you wander off the path, but his main emphasis is on getting those causal factors right. These are the causes leading to the cessation of suffering. And it's a funny thing about causes: When you get them right, they give you the results whether you anticipate the results or not.