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The Practice

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Competing With The Incomparable:

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An example of reacting but not amplifying.

One moment recently I was awake. (Yippee!)

The practice of the Five Perfections can help us realize this idea.

1. The perfect time to practice is right now -
2. The perfect place to practice is right where you are -
4. The perfect teacher is whoever is in front of you.
5. The perfect student is you.

Viewing Peach Blossoms and Realizing the Way



The dharma incomparably profound and infinitely subtle is rarely encountered even in millions of ages. Now we see it, hear it, receive and maintain it. May we completely realize the Tathagata's true meaning.
From 'Words, No Words' Dharma Talk by Konrad Ryushin Marchaj Sensei



The Practice

Here are some things we know about practice:

1. Steve Hagen -- three stools of meditation
 - a. meditate with people, with a sangha
 - b. Don't be judgemental towards our practice, towards others
 - c. Be consistent in this practice, or at least make peace with the concept of commitment.
2. Of these three, it's the two tasks of being consistent and the task of not judging that makes this simple activity so hard.
3. A frequent reason I find to avoid sitting, a reason to avoid the commitment is I GET TIRED OF always scorekeeping...
4. **On the topic of practice, a practitioner said: *Whatever technique one is using, remember that the spirit of practice is more important than the technique. Finding a way to enjoy just sitting is key. Sitting meditation is a refuge, not a test.*** --Narayan Liebenson Grady
 - a. But sitting Practice is often not a refuge, it is not relaxing. Or at least the thoughts that immediately precede sitting are not often 'warm' .
 "Oh this again."



Here is how Suzuki has characterized the discipline around sitting meditation:

[Yet] zazen practice requires discipline. Repetition, constancy, sameness is the way of Zen. Not looking for excitement or great joys, which imply a loss of our true nature, but just seeing the 'is-ness' and beauty of each moment.

To paraphrase Gary Thorp IN A BOOK CALLED 'SWEEPING CHANGES', he says

'meditation all sounds so easy, just sitting back and looking at things, but it's very difficult for most of us to do. We're always expecting or wanting something. We are busy trying to find more excitement, more variety, or more volume in our lives. We feel guilty or triumphantly smug about the past. We plot to control and manipulate the future. We wonder who's watching us and what their opinion of us will be. How do we stack up? Is there any chance that someone might know that we're not perfect? Gary Thorp, p125

Judging and Warm-hearted practice

I often get trapped in the view of 'meditation as a test' of my abilities, of my aptitude. And if there is anything about a test, I know it is about keeping score. And keeping score is what I do. Is what I'm most often doing. It must be the fatigue of constantly keeping score, or measuring and judging that provokes such a long-held resentment towards discipline and towards work. **For me, when I revisit the verse by Dogen that states 'Realization is effort without desire',** I get a little uncomfortable knowing that for me there is indeed a requirement of effort...an effort that may not measure up.

I suppose that judgment just goes with the territory....the territory of building a skill. It is the landscape that accompanies the labor of discipline.

Meditation seems to be Lots of work, and it is something we practice, which



implies something that is done over and over again.....and again, that word 'work' is never an easy one.

Where does this long personal history of resentment towards 'work' come from? Is it fear that I will not be perfect? That I will make a mistake? Often, when meditating (or is it ruminating?), I often do feel like I am toughing it out. I keep score about how I practice zazen, and about how I 'do' most things in my life.

Gary Thorp: *'We're terrified that people will find us flawed in some way or that they won't like us because of our imperfections. We sometimes lose sight of who we are, yet we are always our perfect selves. We begin perfectly and we'll end perfectly, regardless of how much worry we about becoming rich, beautiful or achieving buddhahood.'*

A lot of practitioners write about the challenge of 'sitting practice'

Competing With The Incomparable:

[LINK TO article](#)

Q and A with Michael Wenger

By Michael Wenger

When comparing yourself with others, do you usually find that you compare favorably or unfavorably? If you compare favorably, do you feel proud? If you compare unfavorably, do you feel devastated? Either of these reactions will keep you from seeing things as they are. If you are feeling competitive, the real question is, Who is it who compares? Don't repress this feeling or tell yourself how bad it is, but study it as a foolish trait for which you have some affection.

~~Master Dogen, the thirteenth-century founder of Soto Zen in Japan, was asked by a student, "What should you do if you find yourself in an argument? Should you try to win the argument or should you concede, even though you feel you're right?" Dogen advised neither path. Become disinterested, he told the student,~~



~~and the argument will lose its energy. The same advice can be applied to feelings of competitiveness in practice: Let go of your attachment to appearances of one who wins or has "got it right."~~

Practice just with what is happening in this moment, with your thoughts and sensations, your discomfort or your wandering mind - in other words, with whoever you are, right here, right now. This is the real work. Are you making your best effort?

Commitment

Arnie Kozak has this to say about this practice and about the commitment to this practice:

http://bitterrootpatience.blogspot.com/2009/05/swept-floor-never-stays-clean_05.html

Meditation will not "fix you"; it will not change things once and for all. Nothing can do this.

Our job is to keep sweeping. Thoughts will continue to come and blow onto your clean-swept patio. Just sweep. No need to ask questions. No need to complain. Keep sweeping. We don't need to analyze, interpret, or fix the leaves; time after time, we just need to sweep, returning to this moment just as it is, again, again, again.

With continued practice, we can start to recognize the wisdom in not reacting, or if reactions arise (as they sometimes will) of not amplifying them and feeding them.

We can learn to enjoy the coming and going of the leaves—and even of the endless sweeping as well!





An example of reacting but not amplifying.

A teaching that was available to me (Thank god) just by being mindful in the moment:

One moment recently I was awake, (Yippee!)

and I found a 'freedom of heart' Here is what happened. I started the day, as usual, with self-cherishing behavior, interested in my small self, :

On Friday after Thanksgiving I was troubled by the non-presence of my daughter at the house ...this holiday weekend. She chose to spend time with another family. I was upset and thinking 'What is her problem?'

I observed my rising anger...and then , thank god, I questioned where it came from.

I then realized that one day, she may have her own family. Or said differently, she is already her own family. But to spend time with another family? not with me?, her 'real' family? And ohh., what is so special about 'that' family, and soon my doubts and worries were growing branches and leaves. Accepting another way to see this came fitfully, but arrived nonetheless. I was truly deluded, and my delusion was based on the idea that I was special, that my relationship is special and needs to be honored as such..... but of course that is rigid and supports my small mind, my ego-delusion. My daughter is her own person, with her own mind, big and small.

That telltale word: special. What makes me so special? The same-old seeking for 'more volume', more excitement, more validation.

from Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind:

[But] a frog is very interesting. He sits like us, too, you know. But he does not think that he is doing anything so special. When you go to a zendo and sit, you may think you are doing some special thing. While your husband or wife is sleeping, you are practicing zazen! You are doing some special thing, and your spouse is lazy! That may be



your understanding of zazen. But look at the frog. A frog also sits like us, but he has no idea of zazen. Watch him. If something annoys him, he will make a face. If something comes along to eat, he will snap it up and eat, and he eats sitting. Actually that is our zazen—not any special thing.

Suzuki has this to say: *When your life is always a part of your surroundings—in other words, when you are called back to yourself, in the present moment—then there is no problem. When you start to wander about in some delusion which is something apart from you yourself, then your surroundings are not real anymore, and your mind is not real anymore. If you yourself are deluded, then your surroundings are also a misty, foggy delusion. Once you are in the midst of delusion, there is no end to delusion. You will be involved in deluded ideas one after another. Most people live in delusion, involved in their problem, trying to solve their problem.*

Which is another way of saying that most people are in the midst of SCOREKEEPING. Keeping score about who is honoring who, who is honoring whose specialness. I guess this is also called self-cherishing...which Pema Chodron so aptly describes as 'the root of all suffering'.

Here is some help to keep us sweeping on a moment to moment basis-- I direct you to the following teaching because it is a quotable message. I just keep revisiting this message to help myself stay with *what is happening in this moment*:

MICHAEL WENGER:

“Stay with your thoughts and sensations, your discomfort or your wandering mind - in other words, with whoever you are, right here, right now. This is the real work. Are you making your best effort?”



The practice of the Five Perfections can help us realize this idea.

1. The perfect time to practice is right now -

not tomorrow or next week or when you're less busy, but right now. Nothing is lacking now: the dharma gate is wide open. All the "if-onlys" in the world are just excuses that keep you from meeting this moment.

2. The perfect place to practice is right where you are -

not in an ashram in India, or in a monastery in Japan, or in a different meditation center in your town. You can always compare. Instead, practice right here, in earnest!

3. The perfect teaching is the one before you.

The one about my daughter and this one:

Richard Baker Roshi once told of a dream he had: He was trying to find the answer to a question, and the telephone rang. He ignored the phone and focused instead on the question. On the thirtieth ring he picked up the phone, and the answer came to him through the receiver. What he had labeled a distraction was really the point.

4. The perfect teacher is whoever is in front of you.

It's a real relationship, not an objective measure of who is the best. You may learn more from a teacher who has faults and who practices with them.

5. The perfect student is you.

You have within you all the ingredients you need to practice. You are in charge, and once you realize this, you will seek - and find - all the help you need. This is the most important of the Five Perfections.



Again, “Who is it who compares?” The more you can come to see everyone as yourself, the more you will be able to use everything around you to learn about who you are, and the more you will be able to transform yourself and be an occasion for everyone else’s transformation. We are all sentient beings, and we are all capable of experiencing one another’s salvation. If you are only involved in protecting your small self, you are in constant peril!

*Am I awake to the perfect teaching, the
perfect teaching in front of me?*

Warm-hearted practice

Back to Gary Thorp:

One should not try too hard to become a buddha. Zen teachers advise us that when we go charging after something, it often eludes us equal speed. An intense quest for perfection is not ever enough. and perfection is not our goal. When we acknowledge that buddhas, at times, declare bankruptcy, get divorced, and fall in the mud, we begin to see perfection in a different light. We understand that buddhas, too, are only human -- not much different from ourselves.

My words now: Trying too hard at anything leads to exhaustion from judging and trying to achieve perfection. Avoiding that is what *I call ‘warm-hearted practice.’*



Viewing Peach Blossoms and Realizing the Way

In spring wind
peach blossoms
begin to come apart.



Doubts do not grow
branches and leaves.

The spring wind is the constant wind of change. The branches and leaves represent our thoughts that want to take root, and seek permanence. Being mindful so that we see what we encounter as peach blossoms in a spring wind, doubts and judgements need not perturb us.

