

No-Tech Meditation

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Meditation is something you *do*. That should be obvious, but it's controversial. I was teaching in Malaysia once to a group of people who had seen many teachers coming through, and I talked about doing concentration, doing mindfulness practice. One of the questions after the talk was, "You talk about meditation as if it's something you do, but we've been told that you don't do anything. Mindfulness is just allowing things to arise and pass away. Concentration, jhana, has to happen on its own. There's nothing you can do to induce it." But the Buddha never taught that.

All of his instructions are things you do. You keep focused on the body in and of itself, the breath in and of itself, and you put aside greed and distress with reference to the world. Those are the things you have to do.

In fact, it's important that you realize that concentration is something you do. The whole path is something you do. As the Buddha said, it's the highest fabricated dhamma, which means it's the best thing you can do. And you're going to learn about the nature of action as you do it. That's the whole point of insight. If you don't understand fabrication, then there's no way you're going to know when you've hit the unfabricated.

Just think about the Buddha's own account of his awakening. It focused on the principle of action: how causes and effects happen. He saw that certain actions led to good rebirths. Other actions led to bad ones. Then there was the path of action that led to the end of action: the noble eightfold noble path. You learn about action by watching the mind as it settles down, watching the mind as it maintains its concentration. As you go through the various levels, you begin to see different levels of fabrication fall away.

When you're settling down, first you have to bring a lot of things into harmony. You've got the breath and your awareness of the body, you've got the awareness itself and the feelings that go along with the breath, and you're trying to bring them all together. You're creating a state of becoming right here, and that becomes your laboratory case.

You've got to talk to yourself as you're settling down. But there comes a point where you don't have to talk to yourself anymore. Just let that conversation go. That's letting go of verbal fabrication.

Then there's bodily fabrication. When you get to the fourth jhana as the mind settles down, it gets more and more quiet. The breath energy gets more full in the body because of the steadiness of your focus, undisturbed by thoughts about the world. You get to the point where even the in-and-out

breathing stops. You could pursue this through the formless jhanas, and get to the point where mental fabrication stops as well.

But the important thing is that you see all these levels of concentration as types of fabrication because you're looking for the origination of suffering. Now, the word *origination* there means cause. And usually when Buddha uses that word, he's talking about causes coming out of the mind. After all, craving comes out of the mind. Clinging comes out of the mind. And that's what we're going to watch. We're going to see these things in action as we fabricate craving and clinging, and ideally we get to the point where we don't have to do them anymore. You can't stop an action unless you actually see the action as an action: something you've chosen to do, and something you can choose not to do. The insight is going to revolve all around this very issue.

There are states of oneness and states of what they call neurotic breakthrough where there's suddenly a great relief as you put down the burden of an old worldview. But in cases like that, when you get there, you don't know how you got there. Things just suddenly open up. That's not insight. That's just a pleasant experience along the way. The reason it's not insight is because you don't see what you did to induce that change.

So the whole purpose of the meditation is to watch yourself in action. As the Buddha said, you find the Dhamma by committing yourself to the practice of the Dhamma and then reflecting on it: watching what you're doing and perfecting it from there. That's the real work of the meditation, and it's a large source of the insight. It's not something you simply get out of the way before you get to the great experiences. You look at yourself more and more as you're engaged in intention until you really understand what it means to have an intention and how the intention to create a state of becoming creates a place in the mind. If you get attached to that place, you're trapped in the parameters of how space and time relate to that place. It's all because of your actions.

So, meditation is something you do and something you watch for yourself. The commitment in the doing and the sensitivity in the reflection will allow you to see the things that will open up new dimensions in the mind.

I was reading recently that they've been developing what they call "spirit tech": electronic devices that are supposed to help you in your meditation. They fall into two types that do the work for you.

There's one type that engages in bio-feedback. It can read the brain waves and tell you when your mind is focused and when it's not focused. It gives a little beep when you're not focused. In other words, it's doing the work of alertness.

Then there are others that can induce certain brainwave patterns so that you can have an experience of great oneness, peace, no separate ego, whatever. They claim that it allows you to gain enlightenment without doing all the work

that people have been doing in the past. Well, it's not enlightenment at all. The machines are doing all the work for you, and particularly the work of watching your own mind. You're the one who has to watch. You're not going to gain any insight, there's not going to be any real change in the mind, unless the insights come from your watching yourself in action. *You've* got to do the mental feedback of acting and then watching and then acting and watching again.

As for the realizations that come, maybe they can replicate the brainwaves of someone who has a sense of oneness with the universe. They've actually found the spot in the brain where you can induce that. But just because you have an intense feeling of oneness doesn't mean it's true. And it's certainly not enlightenment. It's only when you've seen yourself in action, seen the process of fabrication and seen the opening where you don't have to fabricate things any more: That's when you know for sure that it's not fabricated because you're so familiar with your own fabrications. That knowledge cannot be replicated by a machine.

So we have to do the work. As one of the people talking about these machines said, "You can have the enlightenment without the discipline." But it's precisely the discipline that gives you the awakening.

The verb *vineyya*, which we translate as "putting aside," as in "putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world," can also be translated as "subduing." It's verb related to Vinaya, discipline. You're disciplining your mind by subduing it's unskillful habits. And it's in the discipline that you're going to gain the insight. This is why the Buddha taught a Dhamma and a Vinaya. For laypeople, the Vinaya is the five and the eight precepts. For monks, of course, it's a much larger load of precepts. But the precepts are all there to make you really sensitive to what you're doing, to the consequences of what you're doing, and to make you very observant about your mind. A major part of the Vinaya consists of precepts or rules that can be broken only if they're broken intentionally. This keeps directing your attention back on what your intentions are, and also what your perceptions of the situation are. Those can make a big difference, too.

So, the rules are not extraneous. The training of discipline is not extraneous. There's nothing in the Dhamma and Vinaya that can be abandoned or bypassed. Everything's there to make you sensitive to your actions. That sensitivity then goes inside, to the subtler actions of the mind. And it's up to you to see them, and to judge which actions are worth doing, which ones are not. It's in the sensitivity and in the refinement of your powers of judgment: that's where the real insights are going to come.

So, you've got to do the work. Keep on doing the meditation. Simply get better and better at watching yourself as you do it, and learning from what you see. That's how the meditation will yield its best results.