

# *The Treasure Hunt*

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When you meditate, try to think of it as a process of exploration. Don't have a lot of preconceived notions about what you're going to find. If you go into it thinking that you're going to reprogram your mind, well, you could reprogram your mind into seeing almost anything. If you believe firmly enough that if you saw iridescent clouds all around you that would be a good sign, you could make yourself see iridescent clouds. If you believe firmly enough that if you saw the whole world as blue you'd find true happiness, then you would make yourself see the whole world as blue. But that's no indication that the world really is blue.

So instead, you're asked to explore. The Buddha doesn't give a lot of descriptions of the goal – although he does give a few hints – but he gives a lot of detail on how to find it. It's like a treasure hunt. He says that if you go into the next room and you look in this particular way, you're going to uncover something of value. And he gives you a couple of tests for determining whether the object you find is the valuable object or not: Is it subject to change? Is there any stress? Is there any sense of possession? If there is, it's not what you're looking for. But as to what precisely it *is* that you're looking for, he gives only a few hints. So what we should focus on is the process of what we're doing.

Think back on his Awakening. There were three knowledges that preceded his attainment of nibbana: knowledge of previous lives, knowledge of beings passing away and being reborn in line with their karma, and then knowledge of the four noble truths. Those first two knowledges were not all that certain; there was still an element of possible doubt. Visions of previous lifetimes don't necessarily mean you actually had previous lifetimes. You can see people passing away and being reborn in line with their karma, but does that mean that it really happens? You can see all kinds of things, but it doesn't mean they're true.

The Buddha realized that the way to test those visions lay in testing that issue of karma, what people do, in the present moment. This is one thing you can know directly. You can know directly what you're doing. When you focus the mind, you know you're focusing the mind. When the mind settles down, you know it's settling down. When the mind wanders off, you know it's wandering off. These are things you really know here and now. When you experience suffering, you know. When you experience a lack of suffering, you know.

So those are the two issues the Buddha focused on: the feelings of suffering and the knowledge of actions. The second knowledge suggested that there was a

connection between the two, so the Buddha decided to see if this was true. These two are very certain things. When you're suffering, no one can convincingly tell you, "That's not really suffering; you're not suffering." Other things you might know can be shaped by the rules of the languages you've learned, but your experience of suffering is pre-linguistic. You know it more directly than anything else. At the same time, when you do something, you know you're doing it. So the Buddha wanted to see if people's experiences of pleasure and pain are related to their actions. For his answer, he looked in the immediate present. "What are you doing right now?" he asked himself. "Is there any relation between what you're doing right now and an experience of pain or lack of pain?" The next question, when he saw that there was a connection, was, "Is it possible not to do anything? What happens then?"

So he worked to let go of the craving and ignorance that lead to action, that are involved in action, to see what happens then. In this way he was dealing with realities that are immediately apparent, immediately present. He was running an experiment to see: What happens when you do it this way? What happens when you do it that way? He wasn't dealing in visions; he wasn't dealing in mystical abstractions. He was looking at very ordinary things – the actions of the mind – and seeing what they resulted in.

We're trying to do the same thing as we meditate here. That's where the focus should be. We're not just sitting here waiting for enlightenment to plop on us out of the sky. We're looking for an enlightenment into what we're actually doing right now. It's amazing how much the mind can disguise that from itself. This is a tendency we've had ever since we were little children: to hide our intentions from ourselves, because sometimes our intentions are not all that sociable, not all that admirable. We can find ways of justifying almost anything to ourselves, and in the process we learn how to be a little bit dishonest – sometimes not just a little bit, sometimes outrageously dishonest – with ourselves.

So when we're meditating we want to muster up some honesty and focus it on this issue here. Let's really get truthful about what's going on right now. We apply our honesty – this is not to say we're by nature either honest or dishonest, it's just that we've developed both patterns – and we try to take advantage of our skillful habits to uproot the unskillful ones. How do we get honest and clear about our intentions? You have to make the mind really still.

That's why we're focused on the breath. We give the mind an intention: "Stay with the breath. Don't move. Don't go wandering off to other things." And we give it a further intention: "Try to breathe as comfortably as possible." That right there is an immediate exercise in the relationship between your actions and feelings of pleasure and pain. You want to develop that particular sensitivity as much as you can. What's important is the particular combination of the stillness of your focus and the point where you're focused, right at this issue of intention and its relationship to pleasure and pain. This is why breath meditation opens things up in the mind, for it's focused on the real issues.

The Buddha once said that insight is knowledge of *sankhara*, fabrication, and fabrication comes in three forms: physical fabrication – that’s the breath; verbal fabrication – the directed thought and evaluation that give rise to words; and then mental fabrication – your feelings and perceptions. When you’re focused on the breath properly, all these things are brought together. There’s the physical fabrication of the breath, there’s directed thought and evaluation directed to the breath, and there are the perceptions of the breath and the feelings that arise from how you deal with the breath. Everything you really need to know for Awakening is right here.

And what is the process of fabrication? There’s a lot of intention involved in it, and that’s what you want to focus on, because intention lies at the essence of action. The Buddha’s genius was to realize that the things we need for Awakening, the things we need to understand the problem of suffering in our lives, all lie right here. It’s simply a question of bringing them together and giving them a really steady look so you can clearly see what’s going on. What happens when you really focus your attention right here and don’t let yourself get distracted? What happens when you develop your sensitivities in this area? What do you find?

Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about his time with Ajaan Mun, saying that Ajaan Mun would give long Dhamma talks, sketching out the whole path of the practice, because at any one time there would often be lots of different people coming to study with him, all at different stages of the practice. In order to cover everybody, he would start from the most basic levels of practice on up to the highest. And Ajaan Maha Boowa noticed that as Ajaan Mun was giving his Dhamma talks he’d get to some really crucial parts of the practice, really important discoveries that would move you from one level to the next, and he wouldn’t describe them in detail. He’d just move on to the next level. He’d set up the problem and then bypass around it. This had Ajaan Maha Boowa mystified – for a while. Then he began to realize that if you explain everything in a lot of detail beforehand, people would come to those points bringing a lot of preconceived notions. Those notions would get in the way.

So the important thing about listening to the Dhamma is that the Dhamma *points* you. In fact the word, *desana* – the word they use for a Dhamma explanation – literally means “pointing to.” It points you to the places where you should look, gives you instructions on how to look, and then it’s up to you to see. When the Buddha would give instructions for meditators, he wouldn’t say “Go do insight,” he’d say “Go do jhana.” In the course of doing jhana you’d have to develop tranquility and insight as well. The insight would become your own because it’s something you discovered. You noticed things that you didn’t notice before.

What else do you think Awakening would be? It’s not that the skies open and some god comes down bearing a message, or some light beam comes down, from the outside. And it’s not something you can clone from what you’ve heard about

other people's Awakening. It's simply a matter of looking very carefully at what's already here; looking to see what happens when you get your focus really well tuned, when you get it steady. You develop all the skills you need to see clearly – learning how to look, learning where to look – but the actual seeing, when it becomes clear seeing: That's something you can't will. The looking will point you there. If you keep looking, you'll see.

So, look carefully. There's a lot to awaken to here – a lot to understand, to explore, to discover. It's simply up to us to want to discover it enough, and to apply ourselves to what needs to be done.