

How to Push Yourself

April 3, 2012

Of course this few minutes is part of a longer practice.

It's good to remember that we're not here just running 100-meter dashes. We're running a marathon, which means you have to learn how to pace yourself. If you push yourself too hard, you won't finish. If you don't push yourself hard enough, you won't finish.

Fortunately, we're not competing with anyone else. You have to learn how to look at your own strengths: how your body's going, how your mind is going.

When you're not pushing yourself hard enough and you find that unskillful mental states come up, you've got to push yourself a little bit harder. At the same time, though, if you're pushing yourself too hard, that will often bring up unskillful mental states, too.

So you have to remember the image of the lute: You don't want the string to be too loose, you don't want the string to be too tight. Otherwise you can't play music.

So you get your conviction in line with your energy. The amount of energy you actually have to give to the practice determines how much oomph you want to put in to the other parts of the practice as well. If the body is weak, you don't want to sit down and say, "Okay, I'm not going to get up until I've achieved full awakening." That's too much conviction, and everything just breaks down. But at the same time if you start getting lazy, unskillful mental states come up, too.

So find the right balance where you can see mental states come up that are skillful and unskillful and you can, on a regular basis, go with the skillful ones.

Even if you stumble, remember: This is a marathon, you can pick yourself up and keep going. If it were a 100-yard dash, if you stumbled that would be the end of it, you wouldn't even try to finish. But in this case, you do pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep on running.

Because, as I said, we're not competing with anyone else, we're just competing with ourselves. And you want to find just the right amount of pressure, just the right amount of effort to go along with the energy you've got.

That way you make it all the way to the finish line. Now, whether it's now or tomorrow or the next day: That's not the issue. Just keep on plugging away, plugging away, watching the results. Then keep fine-tuning your practice so that it's right on pitch.