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EXCERPT 1

ONE

the path of wisdom

A meditator's job is to remember to be aware.

Whether you are standing, sitting, lying down, or walking, if you remember that you are aware, then you are meditating, and you are cultivating this wholesome quality of mind.

We always start with awareness. It is that quality that grounds us and allows all the wholesome mind-states to arise, especially the quality of wisdom. When awareness and wisdom are working together like this, we gain the confidence and the motivation to keep exploring and moving into the uncharted regions of our minds, where wrong view starts the cycle of suffering at a subtle level.

What the mind is aware of—the objects of awareness such as sensations, thoughts, perceptions, and emotions—isn't really important. What's important is the quality of the observing mind that is always working in the background to be aware. The more we remember to be aware, the more we nourish the wisdom that dissolves stress and suffering.

Wisdom is what this practice is about. It is the quality of mind that understands the true nature of reality. It becomes the compass that points the way as we try to understand and

remove the mind's three unwholesome roots of craving, aversion, and delusion.

These unwholesome roots are the three primary mind-states that all compulsive and destructive emotions, thoughts, and actions spring from. By combining in different patterns, modes, and levels of intensity, these unskillful qualities create the nearly infinite range of painful emotions that afflict humanity with so much suffering.

As individuals we don't really know how to deal with the three unskillful root qualities of mind. That's why the right thing to do in practice is to grow the wisdom quality of mind, which knows how to remove the unwholesome roots. Awareness grows wisdom. So, rely on wisdom; it will stand by you.

Forget the idea that meditation happens only on a cushion or in the meditation hall. Meditation is so important that we need to do it all the time, whenever we can remember. We should meditate from the moment we wake up until the moment we fall asleep.

It is the nature of mind to arise and pass away every moment, but each moment leaves a legacy for the next moment. That's why it's important to cultivate the mind's wholesome qualities such as patience, perseverance, joy, and equanimity—so that they become the legacy that is passed on. Once we learn how to be continuously aware with wisdom, all of the positive qualities of mind will naturally follow. Cultivating the wholesome and positive qualities of mind is the aim of meditation. These, not "I," are the qualities at work in meditation.

The Buddha said there is no "self." Self is just a designation

people use. But the Buddha also said, "Rely on yourself." What he meant was that when we rely on ourselves, we rely on the positive qualities of mind like awareness, selfless love, compassion, joy, generosity, patience, truthfulness, and equanimity.

Five of the mind's positive qualities, called the "spiritual faculties," are especially important to cultivate in meditation. When these five qualities are in balance, they develop wisdom, the fifth quality of mind, considered the foremost because wisdom dissolves suffering.

The five spiritual faculties are:

Confidence (trust in the practice)

Energy (perseverance)

Mindfulness (remembering to be aware)

Stability of mind

Wisdom (understanding the nature of reality)

When meditation is going well, these five qualities work together in a virtuous cycle that strengthens the mind's wholesome qualities over and over again. First, confidence in the practice inspires perseverance, which in turn strengthens mindfulness, stability of mind, and wisdom. Each new glimpse of wisdom further strengthens confidence in the practice, and the cycle continues.

The qualities of our mind—whether they are positive or negative in any given moment—will grow stronger and stronger if you allow them to remain. We must practice nonstop to make what's in the mind positive in every moment, because if

it's not positive, it's going to be negative. Practicing in this way, we incrementally displace the old cycle of craving, aversion, and delusion with a new cycle of natural awareness, clarity, and wisdom.

Now let's consider three basic principles of meditation practice.

PRINCIPLE #1 | RIGHT EFFORT

persevere in a relaxed way

We don't need to use too much effort or too much energy to be mindful.


Every day we wake up, we open our eyes, and seeing begins to happen. But how often do we consciously notice this? When we do, that is awareness. It is the realization of our present moment experience. That's all.

Simple awareness isn't tiring at all. Do you need to concentrate or focus to know that you are seeing? No. So long as you are aware of something in your being, you are aware. Whatever you know is fine. It can be any of the six sense perceptions—seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, or thinking.

In the Buddha's teaching, thinking is considered to be a sixth sense perception. Each time a sense is perceived, a "sense door," which is an organ of perception (eye, ear, nose, body, tongue, mind), meets the object that is perceived (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, thought). Each meeting at a sense door gives rise to a moment of consciousness in which the object of perception is known.

THE WATCHED MIND BRINGS HAPPINESS

Effort directed at remaining aware does not require much energy. It isn't difficult to be aware; it's just difficult to do it continuously! You do not need to know every detail of your experience.

Just be aware and know what you are aware of. 

How much effort do you think it requires to be aware? Let's try a live demonstration with ourselves as guinea pigs. You are sitting. Are you aware you are sitting? You are seeing. Are you aware that you are seeing? Yes? Are you sure? When did you begin to notice that you are seeing, that seeing is happening? It was just now when I asked you, wasn't it?

When we aren't skilled enough at practicing with right effort, then we will either put in too much effort or not enough effort.

It is important, especially when you are beginning a meditation practice, that you don't overexert, such as by trying hard to focus on an object or to create a pleasant state of mind.

RELAX THE MIND

The meditating mind is relaxed. We never need to focus too much nor try too hard. Right effort isn't about intensely focusing attention on something.

Meditation shouldn't make the mind or the body tired. If you are practicing correctly with right effort, it will bring peace and joy. But if you are putting in wrong effort, you will feel tired and unhappy when you practice.

Whenever we strive to experience something pleasant or

to avoid something unpleasant, we get tired. The meditating mind, the mind that is doing the work of meditation, must be a wholesome mind. In a wholesome mind the qualities of confidence, energy, mindfulness, stability of mind, and wisdom are at work replacing desire, aversion, and delusion, at least to some degree.

However, sometimes when we make an effort, we do so unskillfully. At these times, when one or more of the three unwholesome roots come into the mind and stays unnoticed, our effort becomes wrong effort.

Whenever craving, aversion, or delusion is present and motivating the practice, we begin to overexert. When we want experience to be a certain way, that's craving, and we start to strive and to put in too much effort. When we are dissatisfied with something, that's aversion, and we try to avoid it or make it go away. Focusing hard makes us tired. It's happening because of craving, aversion, or ignorance of the practice. We need to soften our focus and relax. There should be continuous effort but not exertion.

BE COOL, CALM, AND INTERESTED

Instead of using energy to focus, use intelligence and wisdom by waiting and watching. Right effort is called "right" because wisdom is present.

Be cool and calm. Be interested. Accept, examine, and study whatever is happening as it is. Don't interfere with what is happening. Notice when the mind is trying to make something

EXCERPT 2

RELAX AND BE AWARE

experience, we will start denying it, avoiding it, or pushing it away; that's aversion. If the mind is spaced out and missing everything or busy rationalizing and defending our craving and aversion, that's confusion.

Looking at the mind doesn't always bring good news! When we look at our minds, mostly we see a lot of negative stuff running around. If we think it is "my" mind, we start feeling depressed. On the other hand, if we think we have good qualities of mind, we start feeling proud.

We need to remind ourselves frequently that both healthy and unhealthy states of mind, and both clear and confusing mental processes, are all nature. In this way we can learn how to observe them instead of getting entangled in them. You want to remind yourself that the sense of "me" actually is a process of mind and matter coming together. We want to understand this process, and that's why we are observing it.

When we practice awareness with right view, we come into intimate contact with life. We begin to understand what it is really like to live life as a human being. Understanding right view cannot be achieved by the ego, the sense of "me." Instead, with a calm and clear mind, we simply watch every experience just as it is. Then the understanding of right view—the not-self nature of experience—will unfold.

WHAT KNOWS VS. WHAT IS KNOWN

When we are practicing there are always two things involved: objects that are known and the mind that is knowing these ob-

jects. Together these two—what is known and what knows—form a unity of experience that arises moment after moment. This is important to remember.

The mind is that which knows. We call things that are known “objects.”

Objects include any of the six sense perceptions: sights, sounds, tastes, touch, smells, and the sixth perception, the mind, which consists of feelings and thought, usually in the form of words or images.

Objects appear spontaneously. When we know an object, we don't have to change it or improve it, nor could we do so anyway. An object doesn't have to be anything other than what it is. It is just what it is, and it can't be altered or changed.

But what we can do in the present moment is work with the mind that knows. We can make sure the mind has right view and that it is working in the right way. We can bring these qualities of mind to bear in the present moment by being aware.

The body doesn't know, only the mind knows. This is an initial insight realized through meditation, and as practice continues, this understanding deepens. We experience the body primarily through physical sensations, and this experience of sensations is known only by the mind. It is the same awareness that knows all the perceptions of the senses, including thoughts and emotions.

The work of meditation is thus the work of the mind that knows all objects of awareness. Meditation is the work of the mind.

INVESTIGATE THINKING

When we meditate, do we think it is good to have a lot of thoughts in the mind? Or do we think it is better to have only a few thoughts, or even no thoughts in the mind?

If we believe it's better to have few or no thoughts in the mind, then we are likely to resist thinking whenever thoughts arise in the mind.

But thinking is just nature. Can we stop nature or avoid nature? It's impossible. Instead we merely need to see that thinking is nature. That is right view. With this view we can start to skillfully live with thinking instead of resisting the nature that is thinking.

You need to be able to recognize when the mind is thinking, but not get entangled in what is being thought. There is no need to get caught in the story your thoughts are telling. There is no need to automatically believe that the story running in the mind is true.

Rather, be interested in the fact that the mind is thinking. It's a process that is happening. If you are not used to acknowledging that the mind is thinking, go back to whatever else you were being aware of, such as the breath or sensations in the body. Don't stay just with the mind, because you can then get lost in thought.

If you frequently give yourself the opportunity to acknowledge the thinking mind, you will get to the point where you begin to see that this is mind. Then you can know it and not

get lost in thought. There is a difference between being lost in thought, which is wandering mind, and being aware of thinking while thinking.

We begin to recognize that we can objectively know "this is mind." We realize "this is mind, mind is thinking." Once we learn how to see the mind objectively in this way, then we don't get lost in thought.

NOTICE THE INTENTION TO THINK

When the mind is thinking continuously and we become aware of it, it's not enough to just know the mind is thinking. We can notice the intention to think. The mind *wants* to think. We want to become able to see this desire clearly. Sometimes when we ask ourselves, "Why is my mind thinking so much?" we are able to detect the desire to think.

Once a meditator was watching her mind thinking and she asked herself this question: "Why is the mind thinking so much?" She suddenly realized it was because the mind wanted to entertain itself. Once we know the cause of so much thinking, that knowledge will slow or stop it.

When we look at thoughts in this way, we become able to understand certain processes such as cause-and-effect relationships between the mind and body, or how the mind labels "right and wrong." We're not interested in the content of the thoughts. We want to understand the phenomenon of thinking, especially in relation to the unskillful qualities of wanting

SEVERAL DAILY MEDITATIONS

DAY 1

relax

Relax and be aware.

Many meditators think that being aware means focusing on an object with a great deal of energy. In fact, exertion like this causes tension because it's the result of trying hard to create a positive or happy state of mind, which actually is the unwholesome root of greed at work.

Instead, as you maintain continuous awareness of whatever is happening, strike a balance between being relaxed and being interested.

When you are relaxed, it is easier to be aware, and it becomes an enjoyable, pleasant, and interesting experience.

Cultivate your interest in being aware by noticing when interest is present and when it is not. Bring in some interest if it's missing.

Interest brings energy to the mind naturally, without straining, focusing, or exertion. It requires no individual effort, and so we can bring interest continuously without getting tired. In fact, observing like this gives us energy and joy.

If you look for a result or want something to happen, you will

RELAX AND BE AWARE

only tire yourself out. It's important to conserve energy so you can practice continuously. So stay relaxed.

The meditating mind is naturally relaxed, calm, and peaceful. So when you stay with the meditating mind, you naturally learn to not focus, control, create, constrict, or restrict.

Meditation is accepting whatever arises, pleasant or unpleasant, "good" or "bad," and observing it in a relaxed way.

So practice in a relaxed way, but don't stop practicing.

Check yourself often: Are you tense or relaxed?

Check the mind and the body.

Any tension in the mind or body indicates you are likely wanting something, disliking something and wanting it to go away, or feeling confused about something.

You will notice that tension never takes hold in the mind alone. If there is tension in the mind as the result of the unwholesome roots, then it will be reflected in tension somewhere in the body.

Consciously relaxing those physical tensions is a kind of meditation.

The awareness we are seeking is unprompted. We are not digging for it.

We are simply residing in the ebb and flow of nature itself.

See if you can notice this.

be simple and just know

Don't exert. Just pay attention to whatever objects are arising in your awareness—physical sensations, sense perceptions, thoughts, emotions, whatever. You will know what needs to be known.

If our eyes are open, seeing happens, even though we don't try to see. Similarly, we don't have to listen—hearing still happens.

Even without paying close attention, we can still know whatever is going on.

Be simple and just know. It's effortless. If you see striving or dissatisfaction in how you are being aware, let it go if you can.

Awareness can be quiet and calm and yet alert and interested in what it knows. Are you clear about what you are aware of? Is there a clear feeling of knowing?

Let experiences come as they may. Whatever you are knowing in the body and the mind, let it be as it is.

Notice the difference between what is knowing and what is being known. Notice that they have different roles and different

natures. *To know* versus *to be known*. Awareness *knows*; objects are *known*.

An object can't be anything other than what it is, because that is its nature. Its nature is to be known. You don't need to control it or manipulate it. You just observe it.

Observing needs to have right view and to be persistent. Right view is that all objects are just nature, that all experience is just nature. Right effort means keeping awareness as continuous as possible.

Don't complain about experience; appreciate that it can be known.

Appreciate awareness every moment.

always meditate

Are you being aware or are you just thinking?

Being aware is staying simple and just knowing.

Don't forget to always meditate, to always be in meditation. There is room for awareness in every moment, not just when you sit.

Every moment, this is critical.

Continuity of awareness is so important. As much as you can muster, be aware. Awareness, awareness, awareness.

Whatever you do, know it as you do it.

When you sit, know that you are sitting. When you stand up, know that you are standing up. When you are walking, know that you are walking.

When you open a door, hold a glass of water, read a book, chop carrots, sweep the floor, go to the toilet, talk with a friend, smell a flower—know each thing that you are doing when you are doing it.

What is our aim? It is to know, to be aware, to awaken.

RELAX AND BE AWARE

Every moment that we bring awareness to life weakens the darkness of delusion.

Take the dhamma seriously.

Practice with dedication.

“not me, not mine”

When practicing meditation, all objects should be left in their natural state. We should allow our experience to unfold naturally.

What is the mind knowing right now?

Is awareness present in the mind?

We are not trying to change the object or the experience. We are trying to work with the mind that observes.

Our effort therefore should be directed not toward objects but toward awareness: to be aware, to have right view, and to keep these continuous.

Check to see if awareness is present as often as you can remember. If it is not present, the very act of checking instantly will make it so.

When you check to see if awareness is present, also check to see if right view is present in the mind.

If right view isn't present, you can bring it in with this reminder: “This is not me, not mine. It is just nature.”

RELAX AND BE AWARE

You can say "Not me, not mine" about any object that is known.

"Not me, not mine" is right view about all sensations, emotions, perceptions, and thoughts. In the case of any such object that gives us pleasant feelings, reminding ourselves "not me, not mine" helps us to avoid grasping and attachment to those pleasant experiences.

We still experience pleasantness, of course. But reminding ourselves "not me, not mine" allows us to let go of it quite easily and thus to remain free to know and experience whatever happens next.

"Not me, not mine" is also right view about unpleasant experiences such as physical pain and emotional and mental distress of all kinds including anger, fear, grief, anxiety, obsession, and depression.

When we remind ourselves "not me, not mine" about unpleasant experiences, we don't get entangled by making them all about "me."

Whatever you experience, understand it with this right view.

By practicing in this way, continuous awareness with right view will build its own momentum. It will begin to happen naturally, and all of the mind's positive qualities will be nourished.

in happiness, stay aware

Most of us remember to be aware only when we are unhappy.

The moment things get better, the mind feels more relaxed, and we forget to continue to be aware.

If we don't maintain continuous awareness when we are happy, then the three unwholesome roots will start to grow again in the mind, and they'll reattack with extra strength and force.

If a bucket is leaking, it will never fill up no matter how much water you pour into it. But if you can plug the leak, then you can fill it up.

When we're unhappy, we remember to be aware again. By then the unwholesome roots have grown big again with a vengeance. And so we get stuck in a familiar cycle of trying to deal with our most painful emotions.

We get stuck over and over because we are not prepared. We don't maintain a steady practice of remaining aware with wisdom. We meditate when things aren't going well, and we know we want some relief, but when life is going along smoothly, we easily forget.

RELAX AND BE AWARE

When people say they want to meditate because they want to be happy, I feel a bit alarmed because they only understand emotional happiness.

They don't understand the happiness of insight, which is real happiness. The happiness of insight comes from knowing the way things are. This means knowing deeply that things can be no other way and being at peace with that.

Insight yields a different kind of happiness, the true happiness of peace. It is not the kind of happiness that people grasp at, fear losing, or indulge in.

Only when there is true understanding is there true happiness.

Never forget to keep meditating, even when things are going well.