

## June 2019

Greetings,

Summer is here. We had a 95 degree day last week here in Seattle. In a way summer is like the Holidays. It is an easy time to get distracted and let our meditation and training lapse. So, I would like to give us all a bit of reminder to keep our training going. A little meditation each day is very important and very helpful.

Below I have re-printed a recent article from the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter. It is about difficulties. I would like to add that difficulties can be of the greatest help to our practice. They really help us with our practice of all acceptance. They help us to see more clearly the stuff, like anger, fear, greed, impatience, that we might otherwise not be so aware of. Then, through our training and meditation we can offer these aspects of ourselves up to the Eternal and let Its stillness, unconditional love and pure wisdom help us convert them. This aspect of practice has really helped me.

Also included below is a poem from Geoff that also appeared in the latest edition of the Serene Reflection Dharma Association newsletter.

I wish you all a great summer!

With all my heart,

Rev Basil.

### **Simple. . .Yet Difficult**

Rev. Master Basil Singer  
Seattle Dharma Refuge

When I give meditation instruction I tell folks that this practice is “quite simple...yet difficult.” I’m not the first to make this observation: no less an authority than Tendo Nyojo, Dogen’s master, admonished him, “Do not think this [training] is easy.” The “simple” part of meditation is that we simply let thoughts come up and let them go and relax into the beautiful flow of the Eternal with all Its compassion and love. As we go about our daily life, our practice is to keep our hearts open and try to keep the Precepts. This also allows the flow of the Eternal to course through us freely.

In this article I will discuss some of the difficulties that can come up. I address only a few of those that are more-or-less universal; there are many others we can encounter depending on our unique personal propensities. I also want to say that these difficulties can also come up at any point in our practice, so we can never think that “well, I’m past that now” and become complacent.

The physical aspect of our practice is the first difficulty encountered by many beginning meditators. Dogen's Rules for Meditation instructs us to "just sit, with no deliberate thought." However, the body is not used to sitting still for any length of time without the mind being deliberately engaged with an external object, like a book or a movie. When we first try to sit still with no deliberate thought, we can find it to be very difficult to sit still. But in order to sit with a bright and upward-looking mind, it is essential that the body be upright and still, without fidgeting.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, we tell new trainees to start slow and sit just a few minutes a day, then increase over time until sitting for 30-40 minutes is physically quite comfortable.<sup>2</sup> This is why it's called training.

Another common obstacle in the beginning is difficulty in letting thoughts simply arise and pass away, without clinging to pleasant thoughts or pushing away unhappy ones. We all have different kinds of thoughts that grab us, often involving regrets about the past or fears about the future. We have to remain diligently mindful in meditation and, when thoughts and emotions rise into consciousness, gently release them to dissolve into the Great Ocean of meditation. And the reverse of an overactive mind can also be an obstacle, which is a tendency for some to fall asleep or go into a mindless fog. Again, diligence and mindfulness are very important. I also want to say that these difficulties can also come up at any point in our practice.

Another big difficulty is that our egocentric self does not want to relinquish its hold on our body and mind, and it will try everything in its means to halt our training. We have to remember that the self's tools are greed, hate, and delusion and that we will experience these as suffering. I would like to quote Rev. Master Jiyu Kennett on this point:

We must indeed know the housebuilder of this house of ego, know all his tools, know all his building materials. There is no other way that we can know Immaculacy.<sup>3</sup>

The ego is very tricky and knows our weaknesses better than anyone. I know from personal experience and from talking to others that it will use all kinds of sneaky tricks to convince us to discontinue our practice. For one thing, it will try to convince us that we're inadequate and don't have what it takes and are not good enough to do this practice. On the other hand, it will appeal to our vanity and delude us into thinking that we are better than this and don't need to do spiritual training. If we experience an arid period in our training, the ego points out that training doesn't really work and is a waste of time and that we'd be better off finding a "fun" diversion. Another tactic the self takes is that we are giving up our "freedom." In a sense it is right: we are giving up our freedom—our freedom to go with cynicism, judgmentalism and being caught up in strong opinions. We will see—if we keep up our practice—that these so called freedoms cause us suffering by blocking that beautiful flow of the Eternal. When I went on a big

diet years ago I had to give up my “freedom” to eat certain foods and amounts. It really helped me.

There are many other difficulties that can come up. I wanted to give some examples of the kind of things that will come at us.

I think sometimes of the high hurdle races, where you run a short distance and then have to jump over a high hurdle. This is similar to spiritual training. We go for a while and then an obstacle arises and we have to recognize it and transcend it. And just as the hurdler has a whole series of hurdles to get over in order to complete the race, so the trainee encounters not just one obstacle, but a series of obstacles, none of which is insurmountable.

All the causes of suffering can be converted in time as long as we continue in our training: “Going, going, going on beyond, and always going on beyond, always becoming Buddha.”<sup>4</sup>

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1 An excellent video overview of the physical aspects of meditation can be found at <https://jizospring.com/medInstruction/physicalAspects.html>

2 See <https://jizospring.com/medInstruction/establishMedPractice.html>

3 In Kyojukaimon and Commentary: Giving and Receiving the Teaching of the Precepts. <http://northcascadesbuddhistpriory.org/Precepts/Kyojukaimon.pdf>

4 The closing line of the Scripture of Great Wisdom, tr. Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett

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**Night-time**  
Geoff Nisbet

In darkness I sit, as the exquisite silence of night reveals  
The inherent luminosity of Being,  
The magnificence and glory of God.  
In one moment, the whole of existence.