

Refining Your Practice

Day-long retreat, May 12th, 2018

Does anyone here play a musical instrument professionally, or at a professional skill level? After you learned the basics and were able to follow the music, what was the most important thing to do in order to get better? What did you do to increase your skill? Practice, right? You maybe continued to study theory and to listen to other musicians and so on, but it was just playing a *lot* that really helped you improve, right? Did you continue to take lessons? Did you find that having someone to give you suggestions and demonstrate things was helpful too? But without the practice, it was not in itself going to make you a better player, right?

How about any serious athletes? Has anyone ever trained for a marathon, or for a rim-to-rim, or a 14,000 foot ascent? What was most important then in getting into shape? Was it reading about how to train? Was it getting guidance from a coach? No, it was actually hiking, or running, or whatever your sport was, right? Though probably the coach gave you some useful instruction that you could apply to your training regimen.

It's the same with meditation. The only way that you are going to refine your skill, deepen your practice, experience insights, gain some freedom from inner friction, is by doing it. By meditating *a lot*. That's what we're going to do today. Instead of a single talk later this morning about a particular conceptual topic, I'm going to give you some instruction and some tips and some guided meditation for three techniques that we've been studying throughout this year, and then we're going to spend time doing it. Don't worry, the sitting and walking periods will only be 25 minutes each, but we're going to focus on making the most of every moment.

There's something very powerful about sitting with a group of other meditators, and something special that happens when you meditate for long periods of time, so between the situation here and the little bits of coaching I'll offer, we can expect this day to have a significant impact on your personal meditation practice. You might notice it subjectively with some pleasant or interesting experiences, but even if the entire day is uncomfortable and frustrating, the work going on deep inside will put down roots and bear fruit in the days and weeks and years to come.

So let's jump right in to our first 25 minute sitting period. I'll do a guided meditation of a basic body scan for the first few minutes, and then I'll be quiet while we all settle into a day of deep work.

Unified Mindfulness: A Contemplative Odyssey

Let's start by each of us setting an intention to do our best to be here in the moment, to do our best to maintain our techniques, and to strengthen our concentration, clarity, and equanimity skills by a strong resolution to try to concentrate with clarity, and to try to apply equanimity to whatever our experience may be.

[Begin GM body scan]