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INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION – WEEK 3

In meditation we develop two important mental qualities, which are inter-related and support each other, developing one helps to strengthen the other.

1. **Concentration** which is the ability to sustain the attention on one thing for a long period of time.
2. **Awareness or mindfulness** which is the quality of knowing or presence of mind.

Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is often alternated with sitting meditation as a form of practice. To begin, measure a path which is about 20 paces in length. Stand at one end of the path and let the attention rest on the feeling of the body standing upright. The hands are clasped in front of the body. Allow the eyes to gaze on the ground about two metres in front of you.

Now walk mindfully to the end of the path. Stop, for a couple of breaths, focus on the body standing. Turn and walk slowly back again. While walking be aware of the general flow of physical sensations or more closely direct your attention to the feet. The exercise for the mind is to keep bringing its attention back to the movement of the feet, the sensation of the feet touching the ground and the feelings of stopping and starting.

Meditation in Action

Sitting meditation is very good for developing concentration and more refined states of mind. However, it's important to be able to incorporate meditation into one's daily life so that ordinary activities also become a form of meditation.

If our daily life is full of hectic confusion, with the mind scattered, then it will be very difficult to concentrate the mind when we come to sit in meditation. On the other hand, if we are able to be more mindful during the day then the mind is already quite calm when we come to sit and it will easily become concentrated.

For meditation in action we do not expect to achieve a refined concentration on one thing only but instead develop greater awareness around whatever activity we are involved doing, such as washing dishes, sweeping, bathing, dressing etc. can be acts of meditation, provided they are done with awareness. To be aware is to be meditating.

Two Examples:

Eating: When eating, just eat and don't daydream. Notice the food and what it looks like, be aware of the physical action of eating, lifting the food, putting it into the mouth and chewing, experience the taste and texture.

If any thoughts of liking or disliking arise in the mind, just know them as thoughts and feelings. The physical act of eating is our point of reference so that we can be more aware of these movements of the mind.

Brushing Your Teeth: When brushing your teeth, just brush and don't daydream. Fully experience the physical action of brushing, knowing what area has been brushed and what remains. If any thoughts, plans or memories come into mind, just know them as thoughts and feelings and come back to the present reality of brushing.

What we do in our meditation practice affects what we do in our daily life and what we do in our daily life affects our meditation. By being fully present and giving attention to what we are doing we begin to know ourselves more fully because we notice the nature of the mind with its habitual tendencies. If these habitual ways of reacting to situations cause problems or suffering for ourselves or others, then we can change them.

A Dishwashers Guide to Life

While washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes.

If while washing dishes, we think only of the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not alive during the time we are washing dishes.

The fact that we are here washing these bowls is a wondrous reality, a miracle of life.

If we can't wash the dishes, the chances are we won't be able to drink our tea either. While drinking the cup of tea, we will only be thinking of other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands.

Thus we are sucked away into the future and we are incapable of living one minute of life.

Thich Nhat Hanh