

Beginning Our Practice

by Rodney Smith

When we begin to practice meditation, it is useful to reflect on what we expect the meditation to do for us. What is our motivation for wanting to learn to meditate? This is important because we will judge the meditation according to the goals we set for the practice. Our tolerance for doing this hard work will last only as long as we experience some expected result. Our expectations around meditation come from what we have heard or read about the process from other meditators. We begin on the faith of what others have experienced for themselves. We hear these stories and think how we too would like to bring more calm into our lives. Given all the confusion we feel, calmness of being will make us a better person. So we begin practicing to see if we can also experience this calm. We give it a reasonable length of time. If nothing happens we give it up.

When we hold the meditation to a specific result, we may miss all the other benefits the process is bringing because our particular goal is not being met. We may miss the enhanced feelings of well being, the clarity of thought. The simplicity of being, the directness of conduct, and the growing sense of self integrity. We may miss the greater affection we feel for life and our increase ability to obtain intimacy and listen to others. We can become so set on achieving the one quality we are focused on obtaining, we miss the forest for the trees.

Meditation frequently works on us very differently than we think it will. The one quality we most strive to obtain seems to remain distant even as our efforts increase towards that goal. It is a little like a cat chasing its own tail. The tail is always out of reach no matter how fast we seem to be pursuing it. If the cat were to stop, the tail would be within easy reach. So it is with meditation. Much of what we learn in meditation is to simply stop. The traits we strive so hard to acquire are qualities which are inherent in the stopping itself. We never have to acquire anything at all in spiritual practice. It is all present when we learn to free ourselves from ambitious pursuit which has kept us off balanced.

This is the real secret of meditation. There are no others. There are no guarantees in this practice except this one. If we can learn this in the beginning we can save ourselves unlimited difficulty throughout the unfolding of our spiritual lives. Simply to stop and be with ourselves as we are, opens all the spiritual doors we desire. Happiness and joy are in the recognition of this truth. To be truly content we need not be anything other than what we have always been.