The Desire to Meditate

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When you meditate, you have to want to meditate, as with any skill. You have to take the desire to get results, and you have to adjust it so the desire doesn’t become an obstacle. So it actually helps you with the skill. Because if you don’t have any desire at all, then you’re not going to do the skill at all. The important thing is to figure out what are the causes for the good results you want, and then focus your desire on doing the cause as well. Like right now, we’re trying to get the mind to settle down. If you just sit there saying, “I really wanted to settle down, I really wanted to settle down,” that’s going to get in the way. But if you look at the Buddha’s instructions, he says you try to be mindful, ardent, and alert, establishing your mindfulness, say, in the body in and of itself, in this case the breath, and putting aside all thoughts about the world outside. So you just do that. Stay with the breath as much as you can. Any thoughts that come in, that would have to do with the world, you just let them go, let them go. You don’t have to chase them away, because they will end on their own. And to do this well, you try to focus on developing three qualities, mindfulness, ardency, alertness. The mindfulness is keeping something in mind. The ardency is trying to do this well. And alertness is as you watch what you’re doing, and seeing what results you’re getting. Those are the things you focus your desire on. You really want to be mindful, want to be ardent, want to be alert. That’s what gives energy to these things. Because it does require energy. Our mind has its old habits of wandering around. As one thought is about to end, or sometimes it doesn’t even end, other thoughts come in, and you follow with those, and those, and those. Like a hobo hopping trains. One train a thought comes along, you jump on that. And even before you’ve gotten to any destination, another train comes by and you jump on that. Before you know it, you’re up in northern Canada someplace. So we have to fight that tendency. Other thoughts will come in once you’ve made up your mind to be with the breath. Try to make the breath as interesting as possible. In other words, see what rhythm of breathing feels best for the body, how you can take that comfortable feeling that comes from the breath and let it spread through the body. And how you can let it spread into the tiniest little corners of the body, and then keep it expansive like that. Focus on wanting to do that. And that makes it easier to say no to any other thoughts that’ll come up. You say, “I’ve got something really important to do here, something that’s really pleasurable.” The more you can make this a pleasurable experience, the more the mind will want to stay. So keep this in mind. You’re alert to whether you’re staying with the breath or you’re wandering off someplace else. If you’re wandering off someplace else, then you come right back. When you’re with the breath, you try to make yourself as sensitive as possible to how the breathing feels. All this comes under the quality of ardency. Which is part of right effort. Right effort is defined as having a type of desire. You generate the desire to keep unskillful qualities from arising. If they have arisen, you try to generate the desire to get rid of them. As for skillful qualities, if they’re not there yet, you generate the desire to give rise to them. And if they are there, you generate the desire to maintain them and bring them to the culmination of their development. The big problem, though, is when unskillful qualities arise and you like them. This is where you have to change your allegiance. This is where you have to generate the desire to let them go. You have to ask yourself, what’s the allure of these things? What appeal do they have? Why do you like going with them? Because all too often it’s like an addictive drug. Part of you knows that that doesn’t accomplish anything to go with them. But there’s a part of you that really enjoys it. Well, what is that? Exactly where is the pleasure? How long-lasting is the pleasure? Because sometimes it’s just a little whisper of pleasure and then it’s gone. But it’s already kidnapped you. So one of the reasons we got the mind as quiet as we can is so that we can see those little blips in the mind, where part of the mind says, “Yes, I like this. Let’s go with it.” They’ve done a lot of experiments with people to show that the decision-making part of the brain actually makes a decision before you’re aware of it, or before you say you’re aware of it. That’s usually because most people tend to hide their decision making faculties from themselves. The more you are aware of what’s going on inside, the more quickly you can catch up on these decisions that are being made in the mind. And you ask yourself, “Do I really want to go with those?” The pleasure that’s offered by these unskillful things is there, but is it really worth the price? Because you’re trying to develop a sense of dispassion. It’s because you have a passion for unskillful things. That you keep creating them in the mind and continuing them in the mind. But if you can get rid of that passion, then the next time the mind is invited to get involved in something unskillful you see now that’s it’s not worth it. This requires good, strong concentration with a strong sense of well-being, so you don’t just jump for any little pleasure that comes by. Which is why you have to make the desire for doing the causes of concentration as strong as you can. It’s only in that way that it becomes a skill. And it’s only in that way that the skill can actually help you. All the way to that end of suffering that you want. We’ve heard about the Four Noble Truths so many times that we tend to get a little bit blasé about them. But you have to remember how radical they are. The Buddha is saying the end of suffering is possible. At some place in our lives we’ve had that desire. We really like to be free of all suffering. But then other voices come into the mind and say, “Well, that’s impossible. Accept what you’ve got.” Well, the Buddha was not one of those voices. His voice says it is possible to put an end to suffering. Here’s how you do it. So the path is all laid out. And the Buddha’s giving the green light to that desire. To follow it. But again, to follow it properly, you focus on the path. You focus on the causes to the end of suffering. And the results, when they come, can’t come from anywhere else but from the causes down right. So focus your desires here. And don’t be embarrassed about the fact that you have these desires. They’re a necessary part of the path.

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