

Zazen and Service

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The practice of zazen, the art of sitting meditation, is worth exploring. It really is. It is especially useful for people in the midst of busy jobs where they directly serve other beings, particularly parents, teachers, social workers and therapists. Those professionals have to get beyond their own self-centered thoughts and tune into others if they are going to be successful in their work.

There is a magic offered in zazen for these people, an opportunity to clear the head and heart and regenerate everything that needs to be regenerated so that we can continue with our work each day in a healthy clear way. Not a perfect way. Zazen, like life, is pretty much impossible to do perfectly. And that is not what it is really about. It is actually about service, our daily expression of love for others.

It is important to be honest and make sincere efforts. Our zazen does not have to be tough, but it needs a good base, and there are no shortcuts. We begin with our posture. Connecting to the earth, feeling our lower bodies where they touch the ground or the chair, raising and straightening the spine gently, gazing down as if on top of a mountain, closing our perineum while opening up to the space above the top of our heads. The breath moves in and out of the body. Perhaps we count the exhalations. If we are conscious for a short while, it becomes longer and deeper. We come to know our 'center'. Slowly, through our consciousness of the flowing breath, we can let the thoughts and feelings knotted in the mind release. When our minds deepen, restless movement of the mind is reduced and sources of energy open within the body. The mind has the space to follow the breath, but more and more intuitive clarity arises. We are

no longer controlling. There is a flow to our mind which we can observe. It continues towards abundance and brightness. This happens simply because we simply don't follow our self-centered thoughts.

No, it is not easy to throw ourselves into this practice, for most people. But one taste of this clear state of mind, and one knows its value.

One way to go about this kind of practice is to sit with someone else, or to sit with a group. In a group one meets others in silence. The benefits of this are many. This is the way of the 'zendo' or Zen meditation hall. Here we find the atmosphere of Zen, which is based on the Buddhist teachings of the way of the Bodhisattva (one who works for the liberation of each and every being).

Through continued practice, the energy moving within the body ripens not only in potential quantity but also quality. With abundant clear energy, life's simple pleasures are sufficient. One sees the value of encountering others as an opportunity to share and deepen each other's minds. One can work heart to heart.

Many of us know times when working to help and heal others is not joyful. There are times when energy is hard to come by. We are frustrated. But in these moments, if you can, stretch out your limbs a little, loosen your belt, and take some deep breaths. Then try to sit in zazen for a little while. (If you have a group to sit with, this is the time to go!) Don't judge yourself. Don't await a good result. Just observe your body, your breath, your mind.

You won't find the value of your sincere practice in easy-going mind-states. It will show itself in the heart and the clarity with which you encounter others, and the peace that comes with it.