

# 2012-02-27 Reviewing Meditation Technique

Thu, 8/20 6:16PM • 38:12

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

meditation, effort, meditate, mind, settle, people, retreats, learned, gave, practice, introverts, mental, sense, breath, body, teacher, concepts, adamant, cerebral, extroverts

## SPEAKERS

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I'd like to try to do something a little different. You know it you should probably feel a little bit sorry for Dharma teachers. Because it's very hard to teach. And, and even the Buddha said that it's hard to teach. And it's hard for a number of reasons. But, you know, one of the reasons it's hard is how do you convey something like meditation or practice to a group of people? And how do you convey it in a way that works for all the different ways that people are, you know, people function different ways people have different kinds of minds. characters, personalities, mental functionings different things. And none of it's wrong just different to that I mean properly talked about some people are integrated Some people extroverts, there's a theory that meditation places like this draw tend to draw introverts. I don't know if it's a true theory, but we sit here quietly. And so it's hard for a teacher to know, how do you, you know, how do you say how do you teach something that is meaningful for a wide range of people with many different backgrounds and all that. And then on top of that, to make it even more difficult, there's sometimes an expectation that teachers supposed to talk about what they know themselves, what they've experienced themselves. But if What if their way of processing the teacher, you know, the way their mind works, it's not the same as everybody else's. Or some some of the other people. And so if they rely on their own experience, then it would work for the like, like a teacher as an introvert. It will work for the introverts, perhaps but they will miss the extroverts the teachers in extroverts will work with extroverts, not the introverts. I remember once listening to a Dharma teacher, give impassioned talk that there was a whole bunch of Buddhist teachers there. And to this third this one teacher gave his talk and, and afterwards the teachers met and said, you know, that talk, you know, that she gave a great talk, but you know, I don't think it would have worked for introverts you know, because because she was expecting was all about going out in any and having your Dharma your practice really be in the, in the in their full, bloody, full, bloody, full full hearted kind of encounter and dialogue and talking to people and really being there and talking and connecting and it was like, over use the language of connecting and, you know, and you know, I know some introverts who just just hearing it exhausts them, let alone doing it. So you know, so I can't rely on my own experience only because I miss it, but it I don't talk about my experience, then people get upset. And then there's all these, you know, so what do I do? So it's hard, right? So I sit up here and wonder what do I do. So this is my solution today. And so this is going to be a cooperative Dharma talk. So that's what I'll take, get me off the hook. So you're responsible to. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to describe something that I've learned in the course of my meditation practice that's been very important for me to have learned. And then I don't know if this works for other people, what I learned if it works for how your mind processes things, or whatever, but perhaps hearing what has been meaningful, helpful for me might spark something for you might give you some little difference in perspective, it might not be the same thing for you. It might not have worked the same way. But maybe gave you some perspective on something some aspect of your practice in your life. So the cooperative part is once I've told you my piece, maybe you'll tell me what,

how this works for you or how it might work for you how you hear it that's beneficial for you how it's useful for you. That makes some sense. Are you game? No.

So so it has to do with effort. When you when I meditate, what kind of effort to be made, and the topic of the efforts and meditation is an ongoing topic, that in my experience, I've had to continuously pay attention to and monitor and adjust as I go along. And there's shifts and changes in the kind of effort in terms of intensity of effort, strong effort, weaker effort that I make. And also the kind of ever where I make effort when I sit, meditate. And I've made effort in meditation, I've engaged myself in meditation use my, it's kind of a mental thing in some ways to meditate. And so to use my mental capacities in a certain way, and it hasn't been useful for me. And sometimes I've gotten headaches from doing meditation because I've tried meditate into ways which were not useful. And, or I've strained in ways, or I've meditate in such ways that in trying to meditate, I just made myself more agitated. And just start thinking, thinking more and more just, you know, just doesn't seem to work. And when I was a new, relatively new meditator, and I went on retreats, some of the efforts that I made that were not very useful. I got to do all day. To You know, it's to do it, you know, for 40 minutes, you know, or do for half an hour, you can't do too much damage. But you do it all day, you know, then I really got a headache, you know, you know, or you know, got one of the things I got really frustrated and spending money on something I remember my first retreating went off for three days. I couldn't understand why it wasn't working, why I wasn't, you know, getting calm and settled, I was getting more agitated. And so I'd try harder. And I would get more agitated and more frustrated and to try I'll try harder, I'll just get focused. And it took me three days I never understood I didn't understand what I was doing. What I was doing was didn't work. I just some point I just gave up. Because it's just so hard. And when I gave up, I stopped applying this intense striving, pushing effort and then the retreat began, then something else could happen. Some deeper settling some unwinding some stronger concentration. So it's possible to make effort which is counterproductive in meditation And it's possible to make effort which is productive, which is helpful, which is supportive, which is satisfying to do. And I think it's a task of everyone who meditates to monitor themselves, to pay attention, be mindful of what they're doing, how they're doing it meditation, so they can adjust and find the kind of efforts necessary for them. There are some people who when they come to meditation, they, they hear the instructions, like it's a technical instructions, like like a manual for I don't know, you know, putting together some kit, and if you follow the instructions, boom, boom, boom, boom, then something wonderful happened. And so you get the meditation manual, you read, okay, follow your breath. Okay, I'll follow my breath. And you know, and, and it's, it's treated as something external. But I do this technique. If I focus on the breath, it comes through in Breath, just that everything else will follow. But I don't think so. So it doesn't work that well. It's not so helpful that way. part of the process of meditation is if is a feedback loop, where we're monitoring ourselves as we meditate, you're paying attention, noticing what the effect is. you're noticing what you're doing, not just not just focusing, but you're noticing how you focus. And then noticing what kind of focus what kind of way of using your mind is helpful and what time is not. So what I've learned in myself, is there's a lot of not doing when I meditate. And I have to focus as much on not doing as undoing. When I meditate. I don't know if it's much but I don't know exactly the proportion. But sometimes it's mostly what I do is the effort is to not do anything. And I find that the effort to Do something, anything at all, even focusing my breath gets in my way.

And it just, you know, just stop all the doing, you know, it's so easy for my mind to do a lot of doing got to do this because you got to think about that, you know, make adjustments or whatever not to make progress in my meditation after all my meditation teacher is supposed to be good at this. So let's go on and get a get involved here. And, and so it's all it's doing. And, and I found that sometimes just the best thing I can do is not do. And so the focus or the practice sometimes has a lot of this, stop doing that. Just let go. Don't pick that up. Don't get involved in that thought. Don't get involved in that desire. Don't

get involved with that idea of doing anything, mostly just letting go. And what I find when doing that, is that it's, I often get it settled. me down. Because what keeps me unsettled is the doing mind. The doing and doing thinking about things, analyzing things, wanting things to be a certain way trying to make something happen. And so I find that that you don't do on retreats that's particularly helpful. The because a lot of a lot of the benefits I found from being on long retreats come from just how little I'm doing, they're not involved in a lot of the usual activities of daily life. Social conversations, concerns, and so the mind has a chance to settle and relax and not kind of be picking up all these concerns I usually have and a lot of some of those concerns are into the way I'm involved keeps me my mind agitated or busy or something. I also find like on meditation retreats, longer retreats that Less than that, it's better not to it's like, like going for a marathon, you don't run a marathon, like you're going for 100 yard dash, you're not going to get very far. You could, in theory, give 100% of your effort to run the first hundred yards of the marathon, you know, run the maximum amount you can, and you know, and get 100 yards, maybe you get 200. But you're not going to do the marathon. You have, I don't know what percentage of your effort that's available you have to put in to running a marathon. But for the you know, maybe it's like maybe you run 20% of what you possibly could how fast you could or how strongly you could run in order to stay in it for the whole length of the time. So the same thing I meditation retreats, sometimes, you don't want to put in all this, you know, real strong, adamant effort, try really hard. You want to pace yourself and just let that's something work on you. So one of the things I've learned is by letting go and not Doing something starts working on me something starts to settle things. And some of the what's working on me is unwinding. If I'm wound up like if you're, if your muscles are tense, and you keep tensing it, it'll stay tense, right? But if you stop doing the tensing, then slowly, it'll begin to open up and relax. And so the whole inner life can have tension and in a variety of different different kinds, some of the knots that we carry inside of us are ancient inside. And it takes a while to settle enough to to, to touch those, so they begin to unwind or unravel. So not doing is really good. The other thing that I've learned is that for me, is that if I make effort from the place that I identify as willful to make willful effort, and I don't know how to translate that to other people's minds, What that means and that's a very, you know, I want to be very careful not to give it a set meaning for what willful is. But for me what I identify as being willful in my mind, if I practice from there. I can't meditate. Because what happens, it just keeps me agitated. It's kind of like there are layers in our inner life for a mind. And if I operate on a cerebral level, which is what I associate a bit more with willfulness. And it's becomes more like thinking that I should practice thinking, using my thinking to direct my practice. It's kind of like this control tower that's kind of in charge. If I place if I try there to be what the place where I feel like I'm most in charge to meditate, I can't do the deeper settling and concentration that happens. So there's a whole level of kind of the willful part that I don't I drop

in that was no was easy to learn to do that because for me the willful part, even when I was younger, got me around, got me around, got me to do all kinds of things, what I was, what I knew what to do. And I had to learn to unlearn a certain kind of ordinary everyday effort that I made, because it worked, you know, in many things in my life, but it didn't work in meditation. And so I took the find an other way to direct my attention, then it will fall away. So one of the things that I've learned then, is to make an effort in meditation, to let awareness attention radiate out of my body, rather than be something that I do from my head is control tower looking down. It's not a matter of being in the head looking at my breath, or looking in my experience, or and it's not a matter of the laser focus, you know, the one point It focused on looking as if there's someplace to look at from. Because that for me, that idea of looking down at something belongs more to that kind of will willfulness. And that kind of more cerebral or kind of higher level, mental activity. But to sense and feel my experience, my body to be aware of there is not so cerebral, it's not so intellectual. It's not so mental, in a sense, even though in Buddhist psychology, it's a mental experience, inner experience. And so I've learned that to tune in to my physical body. And then to have the present there, kind of like my body is a container. And that are there. The analogy that's

often used in meditation is that of about pompon, which is money. And if the, if you leave the pond alone, don't stare them muddy water, the mud settles. But if you stare it up, then you know the mud doesn't settle, it stays muddy. So, by by, by resting my attention in my body, the body becomes the container that holds the pond. But I have to have that sense of presence or awareness that resides here in this body. So for me very important part of is not this mental effort, exactly. The usual kind of cerebral intellectual or usual kind of way which is directed from the mind Exactly. But more an effort to let awareness be present in my body, and then to let the like whatever is going to be happening within that body, whatever physical experiences, whatever happen, kind of feel like it's resting in this container. That makes some sense And then I don't I've learned that it's best for me not to try too hard when I meditate and I'm reminded of this because earlier this week I got in my head girl you should get more concentrated when you meditate today and so I thought okay I can do this I know I hyper tuned things for a long time and okay let's let's get concentrated and so I ended up using this more cerebral kind of control tower will place and I didn't really I wasn't really monitoring myself that quickly and you know, sometimes you forget the lessons you've learned or pay times before. And so there I was, you know, and it was working less and less. I was getting more kind of just thinking and more unsettled and by end of the sitting it's a boy or girl You know, you don't know how to do this. You know what's going on? I think I need to go, you know, maybe I need to kind of do a long retreat or take an intro class or figure out how how do you do this thing? I forgotten there's something out of touch. I'm Rusty. And then the next day I sat down to meditate, that's all I know. I remember. I must, must, must but doesn't work for me to do that way. And what works for me is not to try so hard. And not not trying too hard. And letting letting something work through me. Let some not try to be present in this container be present here be anchored or rooted in the body in the present moment. And then let something work through me let something unwind but something settled. And sure enough, the next day I sat I got quite quite concentrated quite quickly. Once I stopped trying. I don't know what happened the day before that. I thought I'm supposed to get concentrated. I get concentrated fine, you should make it

And the other thing so not trying too hard. One of the things I focus on is the breath. But Don't try too hard with the breath. I'm not trying to do a lot. I'm just kind of kind of almost like a shy child. You know, if you've been around a young child is kind of shy. You know, last thing you want to do is go directly up to the child, you know, doesn't know you and say how are you? You kind of almost sometimes the best name is look at this little child and kind of talk to the parent Come look aside, and that kid will feel kind of safe around you if you're not sometimes looking at them directly. And then you can kind of come to them from the side and say, you know, oh, that's a nice toy, what can I toys that and then they'll engage with you. So sometimes my breath is a little bit like that. I feel like sometimes I come to it from the side or from the back. Literally from the back. Sometimes I imagined my attention is coming from my back and coming from the back, I'm going into to be present for the breathing. Because if I come from the front, I don't know if anybody else does this, but there's a lot in most of the movement of the breath, his torso is in the front, front rib cage and diaphragm, that that's also a place was much more control. And so it's easier to come into the willful place. If I come from the back. It's kind of like coming through the back door and not being noticed. And then it's much more settling and relaxing. So I find that the fastest way to meditate is to be slow at it, for me not to be in a hurry. As soon as I'm in a hurry takes longer to let something happen to be. So that's kind of something I've tried to explain a little bit how it is for me. So now it's your turn. So if anything of what I said that somehow sparked something for you or spoke speaks to you something and how your your mind works or your inner life works that is meaningful or helpful or can be translated into for for you in some way. And I suspect in the room with so many people, there are many different responses, many different ways in which something like this might be helpful. Or maybe it's not helpful if that's what you've learned. Maybe you've learned that making strong willful effort for you is the is the way to go. You talked about the control tower. And so who is watching,

approaching from behind? It's the control tower, right. So I don't know who the viewer is a viewer is Yeah. Well, you know, the idea of a viewer observer is a construct of the mind is a concept of the mind.

And so how to make an example for you if let me know, here I am talking about being a teacher, right? So if I'm sitting, if I'm sitting here meditating with you all, and I'm operating, meditating, operating with the idea that I'm, I'm the meditator, I'm the meditation teacher who's watching my breath. That's a pretty abstract idea. I mean, incense, I'm the meditation teacher. But that's like an abstract secondary kind of tertiary kind of idea. It's not needed when I'm meditating. And not giving a talk to have the idea that I'm the teacher, the teacher, you know, there's watching my own breath. So I can let go of that kind of idea that I'm a teacher who's watching my breath. It could just be there's an observer watching it. But then even the idea that is observer is extra activity, extra content. steps in the mind, there's just observing. You don't need to add on top of that, there's an observer that gets into obstruction. Just there's just like just observation. And then but then what's more interesting for me, is as possible to observe, at least for me, maybe this hasn't worked for other people from different places in the mind, and, or different interplay, places of perception inside. And so it's possible to observe, for example, through the filter of our thinking mind, where we, we observe in a sense, we understand through the even though we're looking at, you know, we understand through the filter of our concepts, and you can you can see that if you're, sometimes if you literally watch look out into the world with your eyes, and you see something, but if you're really attentive, you see that what you see is with it is you through an overlay of your concepts and ideas of what you're looking at, and you're not really seeing what's there so much as you're seeing your overlay on top of it. And so some people proceed that way. Some people don't put the concepts over it, but they sense in any way. So they say that I'm meeting with someone. And means this I mean, I don't know what to say I'm meeting a police officer. They just police officers just kind of pulled me over. I have a lot of concepts about you know, that person and me operating at that moment. And so I might kind of see if the person nice person, good person, maybe through the filter of all my concepts of a police officer. But it's possible to drop all the concepts and not see the person as a police officer. But see it as a person. It's possible not even to see it in a sense as a person, but to see it as a being who is Standing there kindly and offering to help and feel the kindness emanating from the person, feel that the person or feel the strength of the person or feel the irritation of the person. It's possible to feel and where do we where do we feel or sense, the emotional quality, the mood of another person. We feel it insensitive in different way than the thoughts and ideas and history of police officers that we carry with us. So there's layers is different. We have different perceptual perceptual abilities. And so meditation involves figuring out which perceptual ability, which perception we can use, that helps us get concentrated and focused and relaxed. Of all the different perceptual abilities we can we have and so the idea of the observer is actually they have to feel like I'm the observer. I'm the watcher of the experience is it Particular is to perceive through a particular filter to so for example, if I if I pick up this glass, and I'm saying, I'm the one who's sensing the glass. That's very different than feeling the smoothness of the glass in my hand, the coldness of the glass in my hand, I can perceive the coldness and the smoothness in my hand, that I'm the great glass picker upper. That's it, you know that perception happens someplace else. And then making some sense to you know, I'm going on and on and on and I apologize.

And so the, and so part of what I've learned in meditation is to is to operate from perceptions that are not conceptual or Little or tone them down. And so rather than watching, it's more like feeling so it's more like sensing and feeling what's there rather than watching you I even though the idea of watching. It's useful sometimes in meditation to have the sense of of being a watcher, and it comes for me It comes in and out of existence. Sometimes the sense of watcher is very useful. Sometimes it disappears and just a sensing and feeling. And sometimes the sense of a watcher comes back or watching comes back and just comes strong again. And it kind of depends a little bit in the state of mind



state of concentration that's operating. I don't know. So I apologize if that was not so clear. Yes, please. You take the microphone, it's coming there.

Humans have been coming here for quite a while now and realize that you know, when I started, I couldn't didn't know how to control my mind it was all over the place. And I had from time to time panic attacks so it was for me very important to control the panic attacks. And then I remember you said all the time, you know you have to trust the practice and the time it takes to build you know, your meditation skills. And I will come some times and my mind will be like today for you like all over the place and some time you will be very calm. And when I look that five years down the road where I am now and I'm capable of controlling my mind and even controlling Penny godox Which to me will have never been you know, possible before. I'm very thankful. So I just like you just need the time in some time as you just have to let go of being perfect and sometimes works but you know, And another thing that I thought some position you said posture is always very important. Yes. Well over position sometimes also very important over over position or represent over position.

Yeah, like let's say some time meditate before going to bed just laying down and there is one position for me that fits in when I feel that I feel like in a safe place where nothing can happen, and just that and I fall asleep right away, you know, almost because it's so soothing. And it's another alternative also to find a state of peacefulness of beautiful, beautiful,

nice. So I like this very a lot of nice things you said and started off the idea that with your panic, panic attacks, that giving you gifts, gave yourself time kept practicing, and just rather than trying to fix it right away or figure the key to what you know, control it or deal with it like magic. or something you just kept practicing and get and slowly began to relax or settle or, or unwind by itself. Beautiful. Abraham in the back.

When I first started, I started with Tibetan Buddhism. And there's a lot of ritual and physical practices. And I think what I realized over the years was I didn't even realize how much my mind was racing and how difficult it was for me to settle down. And I think the prostrations that I did. The physical work really gave me a sense that I was working in a dedicated way and it became very important for me to realize an aspect of myself that was a dedicated practitioner, it gave me some confidence in the process. Even I wasn't feeling like I was getting anywhere. And so that had a carryover effect into walking meditation, especially on Silent Retreat. Where the more I settled my body and the more I focused on my body, the more I realized that I was getting a steady mind focusing on my body, and then I could really start to see my mind when it was really busy. And when it was more calm, and that was a real help for me, because I've tend to be one of those very physical extroverted people. And I couldn't always follow all of these very intricate, what I thought was very intricate ways of reasoning about the mind, but I could really get into my body easily. So that really helped me.

And I think that

the more I do saw that retreat and the more that I do walking meditation, the more it helps me get to a place where I can really observe my mind a lot more Beautiful Thank you

so for me I you know a big because of the way my mind works a big part of what I had to learn was how to make less effort and I found less was actually more but I've known people as a teacher who have made who don't take any responsibility at all and think that's about not making any of you're sitting there like a frog on that log. We just we're just sitting there doing nothing and somehow imagic something supposed to happen and that sometimes those kinds of people need to learn to make more

effort need to learn to take more responsibility and so you know, it's it's you know to pet you instantly know so the pendulum swings need to follow the follow the pendulum to know what you need something Don't you need more effort, sometimes less effort. Sometimes you need to take more responsibility, sometimes less. But one of the principles behind all this is monitoring oneself, which is an alternative way of saying, being mindful of what's going on. But being mindful in a way where you're aware of what's happening and how it's happening. If it's just a matter of just being present for what is without any sense of the patterns and how things unfold, then you can't learn from how it how it's going for you.

Anybody else? We have a couple of minutes. And we're supposed to be cooperative today. So you're supposed

to do I think

it's, yeah.

I just wanted to say that I usually try to put effort into some things at the beginning. When I start observing myself and seeing what's going on, then it's kind of it becomes kind of obvious where to put the effort. And I think one of the most helpful things for me is not to take myself serious and not to take meditation seriously. And once I start, really finding all the things going on in my head, really funny and hilarious, then somehow it's much easier to let go Sam and settle and focus on things

beautiful. The meditation is too important to take seriously.

Also, this idea of effort, you know, there are different kinds of effort to make. So there are times where I've made a lot of meditation, a lot of physical effort, physical effort, when my body to really be present to be, to be attentive to be aware of my body to sit up straight, even. And so they're, you know, it takes sometimes thanks a lot of effort to to with restlessness or sleepiness or agitation or whatever, to really stay connected in the body. And at the same time, to make the effort not to not seek to let go of mental effort to let go of being the one who's trying to make something happen. And so there's kind of two efforts going on to the effort that sometimes very strong. At the same time, there's an effort to be very soft and do very little. These two can coexist depending on the different units, different levels of different mental processing going on. Same time. For me, the body, as I said earlier has been really important. Coming into the body, being in my body, resting my body. It's kinda like the body is the anchor to the present moment. And if I can help keep that anchor to the present moment through the body, then works pretty well, for me just to do very little. But I can't stop paying attention. Mindfulness always has to be there. I can't do nothing and just not be mindful, that mindfulness to be there. But the mindful awareness of the present moment. Can't be too forceful. It can't be too adamant. It has to be gentle. Kind of like a child, maybe a little bit, maybe like the shy child or something, you know, you don't want to get too you know, too close when they you know, just just be there just in a nice way, soft way. And then and so that is to find how close you can With awareness how adamant how a lot less adamant is, is it? And that depends a lot and where things are going on for you inside. So anyway, so I hope that this was okay to do this this way. And I hope that by sharing little bit, trying to share at least a little bit, some of the things I've learned about myself what's been important for me, I'm not saying that this should be this, this is the way it should be, should be for you. But, but perhaps it gives you some sense of what to look for and what to experiment with and, and, and how to, you know what, you know, that it's a pretty interesting process inside to watch yourself. It's fascinating to discover the inner life and the inner life, your inner life is much bigger than you You can discover that it gets pretty interesting. Thank you