

## **Dharmette: Serious and Light Hearted Practice**

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In getting serious about doing this Buddhist practice. There is value in when you sit down to meditate, to take the meditation seriously. But to say that is dangerous. Because it can be heard as like a big obligation. Like now I have to kind of like really buckle down. And I must have been goofing off, for Gil to say that. And then it's, you know, basically I must be doing it wrong. And I'm not sure what taking seriously means. But obviously I'm not taking seriously enough. And I better, better get serious now. But I don't quite know how. I'll just, you know, strain, or push, or, you know, get grim, or something.

But there is a way of also being too lackadaisical, too easygoing, too kind of just kind of like, oh, so this Buddhism is great. Just don't have any attachments to everything. Just kind of like, it's okay that I'm drifting a lot. And I'm not attached to spending 20 minutes in fantasy. I'm not attached to not doing it. Just, it's fine to wander off. So that's not quite right either. And so what's the middle way? But how can we be serious without taking it seriously? Or how to be serious without taking it too personally?

Or there's a sign, I think, at our retreat center that says something like, what we're doing is so important, it's too, so important you shouldn't take it seriously. Because of how we mess it up if we take things seriously. It's, maybe there's too much self, you know, involved if you take it seriously. It's all about me, myself, and mine. I have to do it. And, and maybe it's, rather than using the word serious, use the word devotion. Maybe devotion is like, oh, I'd love the idea of being devoted to something. Or maybe use the word dedication or aspiration. Do it with aspiration, like a real aspiration.

Really, like, aspiration, for me, is a kind of inspiring concept because it arises deep inside. It's inspired intention, like inspired motivation to aspire. And so there was a time I told one of my Buddhist teachers, I don't really see anything anymore as being so important. But the most important thing is the practice. Something like that. I mean, don't, I'm not saying this was a wise thing to have said, exactly. But I had this feeling like, I'm not really not, now I'm not so attached to anything. And I'm not going to kind of get caught up in anything. But if anything was serious, it was doing this practice. Which is true.

I mean, it was the most important thing. And so some, so there's some way of getting, organizing ourselves, our minds, our hearts, our body, our time, our activities, so that we're organized to really, let's do this. This is central. This is important for me. This is, I want to, I want to use this to really offer my, whatever full presence, full attention I can. I don't want to take this lightly. I don't want to take it for granted. You know, who knows? There's a common teaching, you don't know when you're going to die. And, you know, it's possible that some of us will die by this evening. And so maybe you should meditate.

Meditate as if. Because then maybe you would be so anxious, you can't meditate. So that doesn't work.

Or it might be that, okay, sit as if I'm going to die. This is the most important thing. I spent a year of my life, when I was living at the San Francisco Zen Center, with the question, if I knew I was going to die tonight, how would I live today? And that was fascinating to kind of have that over the course of the year to see all the different answers I'd come up with. But probably the most consistent answer that I got was I would meditate. That somehow meditating seemed like the most meaningful way to be alive and to live, if I knew I was going to die.

And, and it kind of, it's a preparation for dying, or is it just, it would not even a preparation for dying, but just as the best quality way of being alive. So to enter into this world of meditation with some, some way that we're really, really going to do it. And one of the reasons why I can say this today, to all of you, is that in our meditation tradition, there's a teaching called Right Effort, and Wrong Effort. And we're supposed to become our own teacher. We're supposed to be able to read ourselves well enough to notice when our effort is harmful, and when our effort is beneficial. When our effort, there's a strain, or a push, or attachment, or contraction, tension in how we're making effort, and when there's not. When it feels like, oh, this, this is nourishing, this is supportive, this is even inspiring that I'm doing practice this way.

And so there's a kind of a, then there's a corrective, you're tracking yourself. And you can read, oh, Gil says to get serious about your practice now. Okay, well, hearing that, I'm starting to strain. That can't be it. What does he mean? And then you kind of, so it's, so it's safe for me to say this, because you're supposed to be tracking yourself. And, and, you know, and not take it in a difficult way. And, and I think that any, anyone who does this kind of practice that we do, is going to find themselves swinging between something that looks a little bit more like right effort, something that looks a little bit more like wrong effort. Making too much effort, making too little effort, straining a little bit too much, being too complacent.

I mean, that's, that's a completely normal, and maybe even healthy way of practicing is gently swinging back and forth. Similar to, if you're driving down the freeway, I think it would be unhealthy if you try to go down in your lane, absolutely straight, nothing at all, no wavering. I think a healthy way of driving is, that'd be too intense. We're constantly making small little adjustments. Someone outside might think you're going straight. But teeny adjustments, constantly with the steering wheel. And you go a little bit too far to the left, you go to the right, to the right, you go back and forth. So, so don't, you don't have to hold yourself up to do it exactly perfect. But you can track yourself and kind of make these little adjustments and try to use the idea of no strain, no pressure, no contraction, no attachment, as, as a protection.

So that when you take it seriously, this practice, now it's time to get serious, you do it in a way that just feels really good. You give yourself over to the practice in a bigger way, as an antidote to being complacent. Just letting the mind wander freely and, and not really showing up here for yourself in the way that we want to do. So those are my thoughts today. That's kind of what was on my, hopefully that

was received well from you. I feel a little bit, you know, cautious about any kind of teacher who says get serious. So you should take my words with some caution or care. But you also might consider it. Are there appropriate ways for you that you can take this a little bit more seriously than you have, in a way that's really beneficial for you? That it actually brings you benefit to do so?

Another way of being your own teacher is you try things out, and then you see the consequences. And if the consequences are not good, then maybe that was the wrong call. So if you say, okay, I'm going to try what Gil says, I'm going to get more serious. And after a week of doing that, you find out that this was great. I feel so much better now. This was really, I'm so glad I did this. Great. Then you get positive consequences. After a week, you do it, this is a drag. You know, I just finished each meditation with a headache. And, you know, I feel more stressed afterwards, meditating than before. I don't think that was a good advice for me. At least the way I took it on. So hopefully it's something milder than that, the consequence.

But the idea is we're also looking at the consequences of what we do, to learn for ourselves what's beneficial for ourselves and what is not. So with all that said, may it be appropriate to offer to you gently, there might be a room for you to take this a little bit more seriously, in a way that's beneficial for you. So thank you very much.