

God is in the Details-Make Your Whole Life a Meditation Retreat

Dear _____,

Greetings! Ah, how to live life when not in retreat or meditating? Consider what ever you do, the whole day long, even in sleep and dreams to be in a meditation retreat! Live your whole life as a full meditation retreat. That is the short answer, but this really says it all.

What does this mean? It does not mean that you are in some sort of retreat from the world of activities. It does not mean that you can not have relationships or have a job. It does not mean that you can not go dancing or singing or shopping or kayaking, parties and read a magazine. However, every event in the day is a great opportunity to be aware (present and mindful), friendly, compassionate and interested. It is very important to not be dissociated from one's body sensations, as if the body sensations and mind are split. The more that you can sustain the mindfulness and interest, without going off into dialogue, fantasy and daydream; the speedier and greater is the unfolding to liberation. Try with everyone you encounter to be genuinely open, interested and friendly. That does not mean you have to do what everyone wants or expects of you, or go to every party or supper to act friendly. Just like in a formal meditation retreat, observe the things that you have resistance to doing and the things that you habitually move to or sustain your interest. What activities drain energy, what gives good energy? Is the environment draining or is it the mental resistance and turmoil, perhaps both? If they appear to drain energy, how could you make changes so that there is more good feeling, groundedness and aliveness in your being? Watch for those many things in a day that act like narcotics, to put you asleep, wake you up and above all keep you stimulated and distracted from being present, bright and naturally alive.

There is so much to do in a day can help build an awake being. Imagine that the whole day is a grand opportunity to build a Buddha Body, like Tara or Chenresig; a body of awakened body sensations and aliveness, a body of awakened speech and communication, energy and feelings and a body of mind that is lucid, bright, interested and friendly. Then, eventually all these three

bodies communicate together and manifest to the world, for others. This is why we say mantras and visualize our bodies as Tara or Chenresig—the Yidam practices. The more that you can see and try to make every day a full day of meditation retreat, the stronger will be the shorter "official retreats". I have heard people say; "when I do this next retreat, perhaps then I will become enlightened." This is preposterous! This is a poor attitude and defeats the potential for deep strength and richness that one needs to be liberated from mental afflictions. Now is the time to be fully awake, as much as possible! One has to build a full life of awareness and meditation to make the transition from painful or obstructive habitual patterns to very free, joyous and life affirming actions. We build bit by bit, step by step, with firm resolve and lots of patience and generosity. This is the traditional way and it works. Gustave Flaubert (1821-80), said, 'Le bon Dieu est dans le detail' (God is in the details) and the Buddha reportedly said something like the path is in the details or pay attention to details. In the details are universes of discovery and in this vast complexity is the utter simplicity and freedom of the innate mind.

The word used in Thailand and Burma, for meditation, from the Pali language is kammattana or kammabhavana. It really means mental culture, working ground or subjects of meditation. It was translated as meditation. Mental culture is a good translation and it takes the practice away from always having to be doing a technique. The mental culture one is cultivating, like helping rice growing in a paddy field, is a natural and interesting continuum of mindfulness. Sustaining mindfulness, supported by interest and joy, will take time, because one has to move through the habitual resistances to be open and friendly to oneself and the world. And our teachers help with getting through these resistances. Also one has to learn bit by bit to leave aside the actions, speech and thoughts that are harmful or blocking growth in our being. One needs to learn step by step what qualities of body, speech and mind support more awakeness and lucidity in our being.

A characteristic of the liberated being is that they are naturally curious and interested, from waking in the morning until sleep, even through sleep and dreams, in all things, even if it is "not your thing." Surprisingly, this takes no extra energy and is not exhausting. One will eventually find this is how the mind is all day, naturally, underneath the clouds of thoughts and fantasies. It takes more energy to frown, and so too it takes more energy to maintain a

state of un-interest and confusion; a state of un-love. To be interested in activities that are "not your thing", or what "you dig" is a sign of increasing generosity, the root of all good meditation and growth.

The "working ground" is where ever we are, right now. Ultimately the "working ground" is the nature of mind, since all experience, from apparently outer to inner experience, is in the theatre of the mind. What you experience, how you experience it, takes place nowhere else; right here, right now--in your mind. If the mind is unhappy and depressed, so too the world looks and feels that way. If the mind is friendly, clear and open, all appears that way, even challenging situations.

One does not have to wait for a meditation retreat to start a life's meditation retreat. I prefer a phrase such as, "enjoyable study", instead of meditation. As an alternative to always talking about meditation, think of the subject of meditation as really cultivating, as if one was tending and growing a magnificent garden, the innate natural state of freedom within each of us. Look carefully for signs of health and illumination, space and freedom; weed out the strangling vines in your garden. Then, with this attitude, there are meditation retreats of daily living and more focused and disciplined meditation retreats with a retreat master and Dharma teacher. One must have the formal retreats with the guidance of a teacher, for many years, to gain confidence, depth, and many good qualities that will blossom and be naturally sustained throughout all of life.

This is how we practice.

All my best wishes, feel free to ask more questions as needed.

May all your good activities blossom quickly,
May you have the means and strength to do lots of retreats and study
Dharma,
For the great benefits to you and countless beings.
May the Bodhicitta flower within you fully and with speed.

Warm regards,
Mark
(December 12, 2005)

----- Original Message -----

From:

To: "Webber Mark" <mwebber108@yahoo.ca>

Sent: Monday, December 05, 2005 10:38 PM

Subject: How to enjoy

> Dear Mark,

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> I have called you this evening to clarify how to enjoy

> without drawing into the story.

>

> A few days ago, I went to dancing. I tried to be very
> aware. Then, I started to recognize that my body was very
> thirsty because of the alcohol. So I started to drink
> water. Then I became sober. And then I did not feel like
> dancing anymore, went to home. I was aware (I think) but I
> did not enjoy. (But I think I did a right thing to do at
> the time.)

>

> I understand that I have to do a lot of retreat but I also
> have my usual life. There is still months to go till
> retreat in ... I would like to know how I should live my
> life apart from doing retreat and meditation. There were
> so many days I was not able to meditate, as I was tired or
> my mind was too busy. I would like to live the way which
> support my determination. I do not want to just live and
> wait for the retreat. I want to do what I can do at the
> moment, which I do not know.

>

> A day before yesterday, I got an offer from
>... I asked if I could have a
> month off to go to retreat. The manager said it should not
> be a problem. I was surprised to hear that. It was easier
> than I thought.

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> Hope to talk to you again.

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> Warmest wishes,

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> _____

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