

## NEWSLETTER

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### ONE STEP AT A TIME.

I find that people coming to Buddhism are sometimes very impatient for results from their practice. I suffered from this myself, especially in my early years. A couple of the reasons that it arose for me was doubt that I could sustain training, and thus wanting to hurry and get it done while my motivation lasted; and also such great dislike of the process that I simply wanted to get it over with. I really had no idea that training was endless. Perhaps it was best that I didn't know. There are probably other reasons that one might experience impatience. Our society certainly encourages it.

However, in my experience, it is unlikely, no matter how much we may want to, that we will deal with ourselves all at once, in one great energetic push. We got the way we are by doing little things, in little ways, over a very long period of time. That is how we have to train: one step at a time. That is really all there is to it, but what exactly does that mean? Well, at first, it simply means to resolve to begin a daily practice. We need to do our best to meditate daily, not necessarily for half-an-hour, but daily. And we need to work on keeping the Precepts. We need to make the Precepts real in our daily lives. When we are truly willing to do these things, we are building a foundation from which to grow our training.

From a daily practice of meditation and keeping the Precepts our faith grows, doubts begin to subside, and our lives begin to take on a new perspective. All of this from just one step at a time. It may take a long time to begin to see any progress, but that's OK. Training works, and if practiced regularly, especially with some wise supervision, progress is being made.

And when we fall on our face, that's fine. That gives us an opportunity to work on letting go of guilt and self-judgment. We just try to clearly see our mistake(s), and then pick ourselves up and keep on going: "...going, going, going on beyond, and always going on beyond, always becoming Buddha"\*. Falling on our face is not a problem; nor are our feelings about ourselves for having fallen. Someone wise said that success comes from experience, and experience comes from failure. Falling is how we learn; how we find out where the problems are, if we are willing to look at our mistakes. If doubt, or anger, or despair, etc. arises from our difficulties, we treat it as we do anything else in meditation: we do our best to not hinder its arising into our consciousness (so that we can be aware of it), and then to not hinder (by encouraging a positive, or negative, fascination with it) its passing on. There is no need to judge. These are just thoughts like any other thoughts. This is not to say that we don't notice that we have fallen. Being willing to look at our mistakes and learn from them is a very important part of our practice. And just because we work on not judging does not mean that we give ourselves license to repeat the mistakes. When we fall, we should do our best to truly resolve to not make that mistake again; and if we do make it again, we should do our best to not judge. We do our best to simply look at it, learn from it, resolve not to do it again, and go on: over, and over, and over, and over again, each time honestly trying to make it the last time that we make that mistake.

Perhaps a comparison would be useful. Suppose that we are right-handed and we develop a condition in which it is very difficult, or even impossible, to use the right hand. Probably our most constructive option at that point is to do our best to learn to use our left hand, even when our brain is continually trying to instruct the right hand to get involved. If you can imagine how difficult this would be for most of us to deal with, and

how much patience, compassion, and acceptance we would need for ourselves and our loved ones in this situation, then you have an understanding of training. And if you can't imagine, try just using your non-dominant hand for a few days. You might learn something. I have learned, and I hope that you will come to understand, that judgmentalism wouldn't help this process. Hopefully, it is easy to see that pointing judgmentalism at difficulties (our perceived failures and mistakes) in trying to change our handedness is not helpful. It may take longer to understand that dealing with any other tendency requires the same compassionate, patient, non-judgmental acceptance.

One of my continuing difficulties was the delusion that I ought to somehow want to train, that I should like doing it on some level, or at least not actively dislike it. It took me a very long time to understand that it really didn't matter how I felt about it, as long as I did it. I realized later that I had this assumption that if I wanted to do it, it would be somehow easier. Training may never be easy, or comfortable, and clinging to the idea that it should be, will only reinforce yet another habit of clinging that we will eventually have to let go of. So, if we truly want to deal with our suffering, we come back to having no alternative but simply taking one step at a time, whatever feeling or opinion we may have about it. Through (sometimes painful) experience, we learn that there is nothing else to do. We need to allow ourselves to look at what is right in front of us. It is not necessary to reach the top of the mountain today. The mountain is climbed by just putting one foot in front of the other, and accepting, even embracing, this simple taking of one step at a time. This is training. It is learning compassion and patience for ourselves, while continuing to persevere.

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\*from **The Scripture of Great Wisdom** in *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity*, P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, Shasta Abbey Press, 1990, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Rev., p. 73