



## Right Mindfulness

Zen Master Dae Kwan

In Hong Kong we have a retreat center, Gak Su Temple, which is situated on the beautiful Lantau Island in a historic area called Luk Wu (Deer Pond). Luk Wu has a practicing history of more than 130 years, and many great Chinese monks have practiced and gotten enlightenment here. The well-known Chinese monk, Ven. Xu Yun (Empty Cloud), once led a retreat in this area.

This past winter we held a three-month Kyol Che retreat in Gak Su Temple. One day during the formal meal, I heard some chanting from a nearby temple. As soon as I heard the chanting, I got a headache. When this strong headache appeared, some past experiences with this temple also appeared in my mind. At that time I asked myself a few questions: Why do you let this sound of the chanting control you? Why do you give power to this chanting? What is this? As soon as I asked these questions, the headache disappeared. I was able to come back to this moment and continue the formal meal, and at the same time listen to the sound of the chanting as it came without any emotions!

Right mindfulness in Chinese is 正念. The first part, 正, means “right” and the second, 念, means “mindfulness.” The second character is itself made up of two characters: 今 means “now” or “present.” And 心 means “mind” or “heart.” So right mindfulness means how to correctly pay attention to this moment!

Zen practice is not only focused on our experience with the body and the mind; it is also about how we keep a clear mind, wide like space, and how we use this clear mind like the tip of a needle, moment to moment. This is similar to sewing. If one makes a small mistake when sewing a straight line, the entire garment would not be correct. It is the same with our practice. When one has right mindfulness, one will not be deluded or chase after what is appearing and disappearing in front of us.

So keeping big questions—such as “What am I?” or “What is this? Only don’t know . . .”—without any labeling will help us return to who we really are and not who we think we are! You can try this when you have a headache or any emotions or thinking. Then this mind by itself will be able to pay attention to what you are doing right now without any hindrance, without making pure or not pure, happy or sad, indulgence or rejection. This is how we use right mindfulness to sew our mind. This is the Zen path of not repeating the habit of our karma. We can follow and act, moment to moment, according to correct situation, correct relationship and correct function.

One of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teachings that can help us attain don’t know, or a clear mind, is before-thinking. Don’t-know mind is a direct and powerful tool that opens up the inner treasures of the eightfold path in order to help ourselves and this suffering world!



## Right Meditation

Andrzej Stec JDPSN

Lord Buddha taught that there are two ways to meditate: like a dog or like a lion. If you throw a stick at a dog, he will chase after the stick; but if you throw a stick at a lion, the lion will chase after you. You can throw as many sticks as you like at a dog, but at a lion, only one.

—*Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*

There are many kinds of meditation, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. For example, lately “mindfulness meditation” is a buzzword. From Silicon Valley to inner-city elementary schools, everyone tries to become more mindful. Definitely there is a benefit to being mindful of the present moment, but is it the right meditation for you? Is that what you want?

Before we choose to practice some form of meditation, it is good to ask ourselves three questions: Why? What? and How?

### Why?

“Why?” is the most important question, a real time saver. Why do I want to meditate? Meditation takes time, so it’s better not to waste time on something that won’t give us the result we are looking for. The results depend entirely on our motivation. Different motivations create different results.

### What?

When the “why?” is clear the next step is to match our aspirations with the method. What meditation do I need to practice to achieve that result?

If you want to become more calm and feel better in this lifetime, simple mindfulness meditation will do. However, this is not a Buddhist meditation.

Buddhist meditation is not separated from the Buddhist view. Buddha taught that correct meditation is the most important thing you can do to attain liberation. In Buddhism we have three vehicles, which culminate in three results. We can aspire to become an arhat, a bodhisattva or a buddha. For each aspiration, a different kind of meditation needs to be practiced. If you want to become an arhat, meditation in the Theravada tradition is a good choice because it will enable you to remove the cause of rebirth in samsara. If you want to progress on the bodhisattva path, practicing meditation in the Mahayana tradition will enhance your ability to help beings. You cannot become a bodhisattva if you practice in the Theravada tradition, nor can you become an arhat if you practice in the Mahayana tradition. Both traditions offer gradual progress, through the four stages to become an arhat, and through the ten stages to become

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# Why Blame the Knife?

Jan Sendzimir

Once during my recent solo retreat I was hurrying between meditation sessions to finish preparing lunch. In my rush to cut up all the vegetables I cut the tip of my left thumb so deeply that it did not stop bleeding for a day. Amid all the pain and blood my mind scrambled for how to fix this mess, and the first answer was to never again use such sharp knives.

But with time it became clear that this was just another way to blame something else and run away from the real problem. Knives are not the problem. They may be very sharp, but they cut exactly where we direct them.

The razor edge of the knife points right at whoever is holding it—at the mind that crams things together, stumbling in a hurry while peering elsewhere (the future, the past).

Why do we not slow down and follow the knife edge right to this moment? Along that edge the vegetable opens, and so do I, as I perceive clearly how each moment is unique. One hundred cuts are not the same as one hundred and one. My thumb can tell you this. It certainly tells me. ♦

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## THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

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a bodhisattva. Those practices take time and, according to scripture, may take many lifetimes. If you don't have time to go through the stages and instead believe that you can attain your true self, become Buddha and save all beings from suffering, then Zen meditation might be the best choice for you.

### How?

When “Why?” and “What?” become clear, the next step is to find out how to do it.

Whenever humans want to learn something, even basic life skills like walking, writing or eating, we need a teacher who will give us some instruction. Meditation is not different. We can't get results without the help from a qualified teacher. Receiving instruction might be the easiest part, but what if it was the wrong instruction or we misunderstood it? The only way to find out is to try it sincerely for some time. I've met many meditators who were complaining that they were not getting results in their practice. Either their motivation was not clear or they received unclear instructions, or instructions were clear but they didn't understand them, or they haven't created a habit of meditating regularly.

If you are reading this article the chances are that you are practicing Zen. The word *Zen* literally means meditation, and in Zen schools we sit meditation a lot. All the Zen schools teach how to have a correct sitting posture and how to breathe correctly. All of this is very important, but Zen is not a “body-sitting” method; it is rather a “mind-sitting” lifestyle.

In our school, Zen sitting means cutting off all attachment to thinking and returning to our before-thinking mind. “When walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, being silent, moving, being still—at all times, in all places, without interruption: ‘What am I? Don't know.’”

Don't-know is our unmoving self-nature, and when we return to don't-know everything becomes clear. Clarity means that our inherent wisdom starts functioning meticulously, “like the tip of a needle.”

As Sixth Patriarch said, “At the very moment when there is wisdom, then meditation exists in wisdom; at the very moment when there is meditation, then wisdom exists in meditation.” They are not two different things.

In the beginning of practice we tend to divide our time into “meditation” and “post-meditation.” It's easier to keep don't-know on the cushion than off the cushion, but our goal is to remove this division and practice “mind-sitting” all the time. If we keep don't-know while walking, that is walking meditation. If we can keep it while eating, that is eating meditation. If we can keep it while washing dishes, that is working meditation. The more we meditate, the more we can keep correct situation, correct relationship and correct function. We are no longer blind dogs but keen-eyed lions, just like Buddha.

One moment of being a keen-eyed lion is better than many lifetimes of being a blind dog. ♦

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