

Practice Instructions

Written by News Administrator

Thursday, 14 April 2016 21:13 - Last Updated Monday, 18 April 2016 17:02

For a long time, I've given this instruction to people coming to Zen for the first time:

"When you sit just try your very best to maintain a present awareness. Your mind will wander. If it does, don't be harsh on yourself. Just bring yourself back to this moment. Sometimes, it's helpful to focus on the breath, or on the various aspects of your posture.."

I'm not sure if these instructions, although they might appear helpful, actually are. They might suit someone who is prone to distraction or dissociation, but are less useful for someone prone to strong feelings or sensations. But more generally, I think the instructions match up with a 'mindfulness' perspective, giving great weight to 'presence' and 'awareness', setting that up as a kind of standard [against which practitioners will tend to judge themselves, and judge badly] but without really encapsulating what buddhism is about.

So I now prefer to say something like:

When you sit, just allow your experience to completely be. Don't judge it. Don't interpret it, Don't

Practice Instructions

Written by News Administrator

Thursday, 14 April 2016 21:13 - Last Updated Monday, 18 April 2016 17:02

make a story of it, just allow it to be. You'll notice that your mind always wants to do something with this moment to moment experience. It wants to define it ['now I'm feeling sad']. It wants to locate it ['I'm doing zazen looking at a wall']. It wants to interpret it ['I'm feeling sad because..']. It wants to judge it ['I'm very distracted']. Your experience does not come to you packaged as thoughts and emotions. This is construction too.

This endless activity of the mind is what buddhists call samskara, which is often -and clumsily- translated as 'mental fabrication'. Nirvana is, moment to moment, ceasing to do that, allowing something other than the constructed world and self to swing open and shut