

## The Benefits of Regular Meditation Practice

Tonight is a full moon night. In Theravada countries, the full moon indicates an Uposatha day, which is a day devoted to especially vigorous practice of the Dhamma. With this in mind, I'm going to keep this talk short so that we have more time for meditation.

And it's the practice of meditation that I'd like to discuss tonight, and the role that it plays in our lives.

We've probably all had the experience of coming here on a Tuesday evening and having a really "good" meditation period. We leave the chapel feeling peaceful and grounded. It won't be long before we encounter something that challenges this feeling. We get back to our dorm room or apartment and encounter an irritating roommate, dirty laundry, or an assignment that's due tomorrow. Our peaceful feelings vanish. Within an hour or two, and almost certainly by Wednesday morning, we feel no different than we did on Tuesday afternoon.

We may find this discouraging. We wonder if that's all that we can expect from meditation—just a brief period of peaceful feelings. What do we need to do to see more lasting benefits?

### Remember the Goal & Don't Get Attached to Peaceful Feelings

The peaceful feelings that you may experience during and following a meditation are a pleasant side-effect of the practice. They are not the main point. These pleasant feelings are as impermanent as everything else. As Chris reminded us last week, during some meditation sessions we might just become aware of what a mess our mind is. Does that mean that we've failed that meditation session? Not at all. We're developing the skill known as *yoniso manasikara* or "appropriate attention." This application of attention strengthens our mindfulness and will help us whether we are experiencing painful, pleasant, or neutral feelings. It is mindfulness itself, not a particular type of feeling, that we are trying to cultivate.

### Practice Regularly

Once a week with a group is a good start, but only a start. The benefits you observe from such a practice will likely be slow to develop. This slowness may lead to disappointment and discouragement which might lead one to give up the practice altogether. In order to reach the goal of sustained mindfulness a more regular effort is necessary, ideally a daily practice.

This is a tall order for most of us. College is a tough environment, with lots of distractions and complex schedules. So how does one go about establishing a regular meditation practice?

**Designate a time and place for your meditation.** Many meditators favor early morning. The mind is fresh and your roommates may still be asleep, affording you a period of quiet. Consistency is key, so try to practice for the same period of time each day. Don't be overly ambitious about time. If you decide that you're going to meditate for an hour every morning, you may find the task so daunting that you'll skip it. Twenty minutes is probably a reasonable goal for beginners.

**Take it with you.** Bhante Rahula says that the most important moment of a mediation session is when you get up from the cushion. This is when you decide whether to make the effort to maintain mindfulness or let yourself slip back into conventional "monkey mind." The more you can maintain mindfulness throughout your daily activities, the more productive your next seated meditation is likely to be. In the development of mindfulness, success builds on success.

I'd like to close with a quote from Bhante Gunaratana: "We must never forget that seated meditation itself is not the game. It's the practice. The game in which those basic skills are to be applied is the rest of one's experiential existence."