

MEDITATION WHEN YOU HAVE NO TIME

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Many of us have a regular meditation practice, whether it is once or twice a day or a couple times a week. If our workday schedule is very busy, we may have to fit in sitting meditation wherever we can. If things get too rushed on any given day, our meditation practice is often the first thing to go. For some of us, it is amazing how ingenious we are at rationalizing our practice out of our busy schedule. At the same time we know that without developing our practice, our general awareness and meditation will not move forward and may even decline. What to do about this?

If I manage, even for the best of reasons, to avoid practice until the amount of it I do in a week amounts to only going to church on Sunday (an hour, one day a week), that won't (so to speak) get me to heaven anytime soon, as in: too little and too late. Eventually, my goal is to make my entire life my practice, and sitting meditation is all about building the tools to do that. If we nickel and dime our meditation time right off our daily schedule, we are just shortchanging ourselves and we know it. What can we do when we appear to run out of time for meditation practice?

There is another approach, but it is off-the-cushion or post meditational. I am not suggesting that you stop your daily sitting practice, but rather augment it in ways that will enhance that practice. It has to do with learning to use the natural gaps in our daily life that we can't avoid anyway.

An example of a natural gap is any event that distracts us from our normal distractions – whatever we are engaged in doing at the moment. If we are busying working away at something or other and we get disturbed, we wake up from that. It could be that the doorbell or phone rings, a door slams, an alarm goes off, an itch -- you-name-it. The point is that whatever the interruption, it creates a gap in the otherwise smooth flowing of our routine so that we pause and look around, even if only for a split second or short minute. These kinds of awareness gaps are perfect opportunities for quality dharma practice. Here is what I do with these natural gaps during my day:

First, for starters, we can just rest in the gap for a moment, enjoy the gap, have a time out. Here we are, awakened (disturbed) in the flow of the day, and suddenly aware. Rest in that moment. By 'rest' I mean just relax and let yourself be there in that gap for a second or so. Consider it a gift! And the next part is very easy too.

Before you resume whatever task you were just involved in (and interrupted from), simply dedicate whatever merit you may have accumulated up to now doing it (however small that may be) to benefit all sentient beings in some way. If you are a Buddhist, you can dedicate this merit to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (wherever they may be) that they may better assist all beings everywhere in finding true happiness and enlightenment. If you are a Christian, you ask Christ to help all beings, and so on. When you have made this dedication, then pick up on your previous task and go on. It is as simple as that.

And the next time later that same day when you are interrupted and once again snap out of your work routine, do the same thing. Use that natural gap, that sudden awareness that you have in the moment to dedicate the merit of what you have done up until then, even if it has only been a

short while. This kind of dedication is a very real practice and it fits into even the busiest schedule. And the spontaneity of it precludes our gaming it, like we often can do to our sitting practice. It happens too fast for that. In a single moment we are startled awake, distracted from our normal distraction and just in that moment we are quite aware. Use that moment to do a very small practice like dedicating the merit to help all beings.

And if you can manage it, you can end the dedication of merit by making a simple ongoing aspiration that whatever you are about to do, will continue to do, whatever merit may eventually be involved in that work, however miniscule, may it be of some real use to bless and benefit all sentient beings. Trust me; this very small effort on your part can bring great rewards to all beings, including yourself.

I have been studying and practicing meditation for over 35 years. During that time I have read and studied many hundreds of books, and taken literally hundreds of teachings. In all of those books and teachings the most profound secret that I have seen presented over and over again as a method for accumulating merit in dharma practice is the aspiration we make before undertaking any work and the dedication of that merit after any work.

Of course, this is especially true when it comes to actual dharma practice, as in making an aspiration before a dharma practice session and a dedication after that practice. Dharma practice is the most worthy of all tasks we might have. However, unless we are openly doing something destructive, there has to be at least some merit in whatever else we are doing during our day, hopefully. And when these natural gaps arise in our workflow, dedicating even that tiny bit of merit is, well, meritorious, especially if we dedicate it to the wellbeing and enlightenment of all sentient beings.

This kind of aspiration and dedication practice takes only a few seconds here and there, and it occurs only when we are forced to take a momentary break in our workflow, as in: we wake up from whatever we are doing for a moment. In that moment, we are free to make this dedication and aspiration almost effortlessly. And these small practices add up big time, not to mention that they re-center and rededicate ourselves moment by moment. And you can add this small practice to whatever your normal practice is, whether Buddhist, Christian, Jew, Muslim, or Pagan. Try it.

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