The Cook

Patrick Kearney · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Patrick Kearney · 46:35

Now that we're coming to the end of our retreat, it's time to introduce the most important topic, which obviously is food.

The talk is called "The Cook," and we're looking at the Sūpa Sutta, the cook. Food comes in because according to the Buddha, meditation is very much like cooking. And this of course reminds us that cooks are in fact very important. In the East Asian tradition, the monastery cook is one of the highest positions in the hierarchy.

If you think about our situation, let's say you turned up here to do a retreat, and you're gathered in the hall on the first evening, and the manager comes in and says, "Regrettably, the teacher can't make it, but not to worry. You can just practice. We've got all the places set up." Well, you can do it and probably have a better time. But if the teacher was there and the manager came in and said, "Unfortunately, there are no cooks. You'll have to fend for yourselves." At that point, you'll be out the door—because you can run a retreat without a teacher. You cannot run a retreat without cooks. So cooks are important.

In the Sūpa Sutta, the Buddha launches into a description of a cook operating at the top level. But this first cook is not top level. He says: "Suppose a foolish, incompetent, incapable cook presented a king or royal minister with various kinds of curries—sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty and bland. That foolish, incompetent, incapable cook does not pick up the sign of his master's preference: 'Today, this curry pleased my master,' or 'He reached for that one,' or 'He took a lot of this one,' or 'He spoke in praise of that one.' That foolish, incompetent, incapable cook does not gain clothing, wages and bonuses. Why? Because that foolish, incompetent, incapable cook does not pick up the sign of his master's preference."

So this is the beginning. Now this cook cooks for a king or royal minister, representing the top level of society in the Buddha's time. This cook has very important customers. The equivalent in our society might be the chef of an expensive and fashionable restaurant. But although this cook has had a distinguished career and has risen up, still this cook is foolish, incompetent and incapable because he does not pick up the sign of his master's preference.

"Sign" here translates *nimitta*, which is a technical term that appears in different contexts. But here it indicates a way of reading or interpreting the customer's response. The customer responds to the food. And what does that response mean? What's the significance of it? As the cook, do I know? Do I even care? Yet surely, as a cook, I should be paying at least as much attention to the responses of my valued customer as I do to the actual cooking itself.

The incompetent cook pays attention in the kitchen but is not interested in what happens after the food leaves the kitchen. And of course, we've all been to restaurants like this where the kitchen is concerned with churning out food according to the formula, and whether anybody likes it or not, they neither know nor care. As a result, this cook does not do well. He alienates his customer base.

The Buddha goes on: "Suppose a wise, competent, capable cook presented a king or royal minister with various kinds of curries—sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty and bland. That wise, competent, capable cook picks up the sign of her own master's preference: 'Today, this curry pleased my master,' or 'He reached for that one,' or 'He took a lot of this one,' or 'He spoke in praise of that one.' That wise, competent, capable cook gains clothing, wages, and bonuses. Why? Because that wise, competent, capable cook picks up the sign of her master's preference."

So this is the competent cook, the successful cook, who is the opposite. She does pay attention to her customers and their responses. She's concerned with what people eat, what they do not eat, what they like, what they don't like.

This reminds me of an incident that occurred when I was living in Brisbane the first time, doing a PhD at UQ. I was living in West End, and in those days not everything was online, so we used to get this big glossy magazine about what's on in West End, which of course I would study carefully each week. One issue there was an advert for a new coffee shop on Boundary Street. The advert showed photographs of a cheery young couple who were going to run it. But the essence of the article was a pledge, a public pledge made by the two owners, that every cup of coffee served in this cafe would be made by one of these two owners. Guaranteed.

And I thought, this looks good. Because I'm sure you know that if you're looking for a good cup of coffee, one way to do it is to walk in and sit down and delay for as long as possible, and you check out who's making the coffee.

If it's the waitress, you walk out. Not that you've got anything against the waitress, but she's at the bottom of the hierarchy. So the management thinks that making coffee is something for someone low down in the hierarchy, whereas obviously being a barista is right up there.

So I thought, this is good. I'll check it out. I went down there the next time I was on Boundary Street, and sure enough, there was this young fellow behind the counter who I recognised from the photograph. I ordered a cup of coffee and he said, "Right away." I sat down, calmly waited, and he produced the coffee. I have to say, it was very good. Very good.

I finished the cup and was sitting back feeling pleased when suddenly there was someone standing beside me—it was him. He said, "How was the coffee?" You know how sometimes people ask you that question and you think, "I've got to be polite before I run out the door"? But in this case, I could honestly say it was excellent. So he's definitely a good barista.

Then I found out he was also a very good businessman, because he pounced and said, "Would you like another?" I said, "OK." So I was trapped.

A while later, I met a couple of friends of mine who were also living in the area and who were very fussy about what they ate and drank. Very fussy. I told them about this place, thinking they might be interested. They said, "Oh, yeah, we've already been there." I said, "How was it?" They said, "Well, we went there for lunch. The food was OK, but it was only OK." And the young man had appeared after the lunch asking, "How was the lunch?" They looked at each other and thought, "We'll tell him." So they critiqued the lunch.

Now, it happened that the café next door was consistently, over that period—this is in the nineties—consistently one of the most popular in West End. I never actually ate there because every time I went past it was full and I was too impatient to hang around. But clearly very successful. My friends said, "You know, the place next door is pretty good. Why don't you do what they're doing?" The young man looked a bit discombobulated, as you would under such circumstances. Anyway, they left.

A while later, they thought, "We'll try it out again." So they went back to the original café, sat down, looked at the menu—it was just like next door's. And it was very good. He paid attention to the sign of his customers' preferences. When he went up and asked someone "How was it?", he actually meant it. He listened. And he adapted accordingly. Of course, that café did very well. So he's definitely an example of a wise, competent, and capable cook.

So why are we going on about food and coffee? The Buddha moves on to talk about how this situation can be compared to meditation practice. He says, "So too, some foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner, surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, lives tracking body as body, ardent, clearly understanding and mindful. As he lives tracking body as body, his heart-mind does not become concentrated, his defilements are not abandoned, he does not pick up the sign." And he goes on through the other satipaṭṭhānas: "That foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner does not live pleasantly in this very life, nor does he develop mindfulness and clear understanding. Why? Because that foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner does not pick up the sign of his own heart-mind."

The foolish, incompetent, and incapable practitioner does not do well. He does not become concentrated, and he does not develop insight.

Now, you notice that the Buddha does not mince his words with this practitioner. You get the impression that he would have been a pretty demanding teacher. In that sense, he rather reminds me of Sayadaw U Pandita. U Pandita had a reputation as a very tough and demanding teacher. But I noticed that sometimes he was clearly frustrated with some of his students because he was more committed to their awakening than they were—and he found this really frustrating. But when he met somebody who was fully committed, he was delighted and doubly tough and demanding.

So let's look at this foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner. The first thing to notice about him is that

he's doing all the right things. The formula the Buddha uses—"surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, he lives tracking body as body, ardent, clearly understanding and mindful"—this is the standard formula to describe this practice. In other words, he's not doing anything wrong. He's doing all the right things, and he's working hard. But the practice does not work. The practitioner does not gain samādhi; his heart-mind does not become composed or unified.

We've talked about samādhi before. Let's just briefly get a sense of what the Buddha is talking about. It's not focus, and it certainly is not strain. It's about bringing together, the unification of, the heart-mind. All the different energies and desires of the heart-mind are gathered together and collected into one single activity. We are completely here, completely committed to this now.

Samādhi is often confused with focus. Sometimes when people talk about samādhi or concentration in the context of meditation, they mean focus. But that gives the wrong impression, because the heart-mind may be unified but not necessarily focused—though of course it depends what exactly we mean by "focused."

The classical image for the focus of samādhi, which I read about and heard about in my young days as a meditator, is using a lens to bring the rays of the sun together on one spot. Because it's gathered together at one spot, it has great energy, and you can start a fire with it. One of the classic examples: put a sheet of paper on the ground, hold up the lens, and you can set the paper on fire.

But what characterizes samādhi is not that we are narrowly focused on one small spot—for example, some aspect of the breathing. What characterizes samādhi is that all of me is committed to doing whatever I am doing here and now. I don't have part of me heading in one direction and another part heading in another direction. So samādhi is not defined by its object, whether that object be small or large, but by the state of the heart-mind—its state of absorption, of unification. Focus implies bringing awareness to a singular point, but samādhi refers to an awareness that is unified, whether the field of unification is very narrow, very wide, or anything in between.

"His heart-mind has not become concentrated, his defilements are not abandoned." I don't think we've introduced this term, defilement. This is a translation of *kilesa* or *upakilesa*. In English books on Mahāyāna, there's a different translation: they use "affliction." They talk about the afflictions. In the Theravāda, they talk about the defilements.

This is because Mahāyāna uses the Sanskrit *kleśa*, whereas the Theravāda uses the Pali *kilesa*, and they're actually derived from different verbs. *Kleśa* in Buddhist Sanskrit does come from a verb meaning to be afflicted, to be in pain. But *kilesa* in Pali comes from the verb *kilesati*, meaning to stick or to adhere.

So the image is this: let's say you have a white cloth, and you throw mud at it. The mud strikes the cloth and sticks to it. The cloth is stained, dirtied, defiled. The reason is because the mud is stuck to the cloth. So *kilesa*, classically translated as "defilement"—such a gloriously Victorian word—but essentially it refers to stuckness, to being stuck anywhere.

Where this comes from is that for the Buddha, his ultimate, his key value is freedom. The opposite of freedom is the state of being trapped, of being stuck. And of course, being stuck is to be afflicted. It's painful.

So if I'm caught up in an obsession or an addiction, I'm stuck in that state. In that situation, I'm not free, and therefore I'm suffering. These are the defilements.

What the Buddha is talking about here is someone who is doing the practice, putting in the hours, making effort, following the method—and it still doesn't work. He's getting nowhere. He just gets bogged down. And why is this? What is the problem? He does not pick up the sign.

So that foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner does not live pleasantly in this very life, nor does he develop mindfulness and clear understanding. Living pleasantly in this present life refers to serenity, to calming peacefulness—in other words, the function of samādhi, of concentration. We cultivate states that are blissful and therefore very pleasant to live in. This is the pleasure of meditation.

When we were doing the ānāpānasati in the early stages, there was a lot of emphasis on not trying too hard, relaxing into it. This is an attempt to bring out the pleasure of serenity. Otherwise, meditation might be a bitter pill that has to be swallowed rather than a genuinely pleasant thing to do. This is one of the reasons why we talk about being playful, why we emphasize being relaxed. What we want is to learn to enjoy the practice, because if we enjoy it, we'll naturally do it.

"Nor does he develop mindfulness and clear understanding"—this refers to insight. Living pleasantly is serenity; mindfulness and clear understanding is insight. This practitioner does not develop a continuous awareness of the flow of events and does not generate insight as a result. Neither serenity nor insight arises from this practitioner's practice—in other words, no one-but stamps whatsoever. And why? Because he does not pick up the sign of his own heart-mind.

In another discourse, we get an example of this, and the example comes from Anuruddha. Now, Anuruddha was one of the major disciples, a cousin of the Buddha, a generation younger. A very talented practitioner—very talented. Deep concentration, great insight. He had attained the third stage of awakening.

We briefly mentioned that for the Buddha, awakening, like everything else, is a process. The first flash of it is called the vision of Dharma, or stream entry, and that gets you started on the Noble Eightfold Path. The third stage is described in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta as where the heart-mind has just a touch of clinging remaining. So almost there, really deeply awakened. It would be quite remarkable to meet such a person.

But Anuruddha felt that he had got bogged down. He had made it this far, but he couldn't move on. Something was getting in the way. So who does he approach for advice? He approaches Venerable Sāriputta.

Sāriputta was one of the Buddha's two chief students. Often, if you see paintings of the Buddha—and sometimes you see this on altars—you have the Buddha at the center with a smaller figure on the right and one on the left. The figure on the right is Sāriputta, foremost in wisdom. The figure on the left is Mahāmoggallāna, foremost in power. I think we talked about this earlier in the retreat. So Sāriputta is right up there, foremost in wisdom of all the Buddha's students.

Anuruddha knows who he should go and ask. He explains his problem to Sāriputta. He says, "I have attained the divine eye with which I can see the thousandfold world system." Now, the divine eye is the power to see beyond the physical and to see how other beings are reborn into their various existences. To attain the divine eye, you've got to have incredible samādhi power, as well as a great deal of talent for the—what do they call them?

The iddhis, or in Sanskrit, the siddhis—literally the successors. These are the special powers that might arise from a meditation practice.

So Anuruddha had attained the divine eye, and he had a huge reputation for that. He was foremost among the Buddha's students in the divine eye. And he said, "I have established continuous energy and mindfulness, a calm body, and a concentrated and unified heart-mind." Pretty good. I mean, you can't argue with that. And then he adds, "Yet I am still not fully awakened. What is getting in the way of abandoning all clinging? Because a touch of clinging has remained." He's still hanging on. How can he let go of that?

Sariputta has no problem diagnosing the problem. He explains that Anuruddha has three barriers that stand in the way between him and full awakening: conceit, restlessness, and remorse. In Pali, mana, uddhacca, and kukkucca. And it's obvious—bleeding obvious—that he's got these three barriers because they are revealed by his very description of the problem.

Sariputta explains, "Look, you've got mana, you've got conceit." And this is demonstrated by Anuruddha's self-congratulation about his attainment of the divine eye. "I'm so great, I've got the divine eye."

Now, conceit is the translation of mana, which literally means measuring—from the root ma, to measure. Again, the English doesn't really capture what's going on. Mana is measuring. And this manifests as the determination to compare oneself with others, or even with oneself. To feel superior to others is mana. To feel inferior to others is mana. Even to feel equal to others is mana, although much more subtle. And here Anuruddha is comparing himself to others who are not as talented in samādhi and in the power of the divine eye, yet they're doing better than him. So, conceit.

The second problem: restlessness. This is demonstrated by his preoccupation with his energy, mindfulness, calm, and concentration. And this very preoccupation—"How is my meditation going? All this is happening, but it's not quite good enough"—his preoccupation with progress is an indication of restlessness, and it's getting in the way.

Finally, remorse is revealed by his concern that he has not yet attained full awakening and still has a touch of clinging remaining. Both restlessness and remorse point to his agitation about his lack of progress. He thinks he's got a problem—which means he's got a problem, essentially.

In other words, here you have someone, one of the great disciples of the Buddha, a practitioner on the very edge of full awakening, blocked in his practice as soon as he lost sight of the sign of his own heart-mind. We're talking about something which can be very, very subtle. This foolish, incompetent, incapable practitioner—relatively speaking, relative maybe to the Buddha—might actually be doing very, very well, but is still stuck in some way.

And then the Buddha goes on to the competent practitioner: "So too, some wise, competent, capable practitioner, surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, lives tracking body as body, ardent, clearly understanding and mindful." The same, exactly the same. "While she lives tracking body as body, her heart-mind becomes concentrated, the defilements are abandoned, she picks up the sign. That wise, competent, capable practitioner lives pleasantly in this very life, and she develops mindfulness and clear understanding. Why? Because that wise, competent, capable practitioner picks up the sign of her own heart-mind."

Just as the competent cook learns to pay attention to the responses of her customers, so the competent practitioner learns to pay attention to the responses of her own heart-mind as she practices. In other words, the practice is not just a matter of reproducing a meditation technique. That's not good enough.

The first clear teaching I had of that principle actually came to me not from a teacher, but through a side door—from a fellow practitioner at the Mahasi Centre. It was during a period of walking meditation, doing the walking outside the meditation hall. Over to my right there was one of my fellow practitioners, also ordained, a fellow Australian, who was also doing walking meditation, moving very mindfully. And I was moving very mindfully. I'm walking up and down my path, and out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that my friend had stopped.

And then he started moving again, but at a different angle, at what appeared to be a diagonal angle. I mean, I didn't want to stop and stare—I was meditating. But it seemed to me that he was heading in my direction. And it was pretty slow, so nothing dramatic, but I couldn't help but feel that something was going on.

And sure enough, eventually I come to the end of my walking track, and there he is, standing right there, facing me. And I say, "Yes, Venerable Sir, do you have something to say?" And he said, "I do." And I said, "What is it?" And he said—actually, I've got to remember—ah, that's right, he had a question for me. He said, "Venerable Sir, I've got a question for you." I said, "Go ahead." "What is the difference between insight meditation and the airline industry?"

And I said, "To be completely honest, Venerable Sir, I have no idea. Could you explain it to me?" And he

said, "Insight meditation, unlike the airline industry, is not simply a matter of bums on seats." Whereupon he turned and went back to his walking.

And of course I stood there in awe at the power of this teaching that had just been delivered to me, and I've never forgotten it. It's a valuable lesson. In other words, it's not enough to reproduce the technique, no matter how hard we work. It's possible to do all the right things, to work really hard, but the project in its entirety does not succeed. What's missing is that we need to read the sign of our own heart-mind. And this involves opening up the field of awareness to see what's happening within us as we're doing the practice, what's happening inside the citta.

So what is the result of my performance of the technique? Am I becoming more collected, composed, concentrated and so on, or not? And if not, what's getting in the way? And it's really important to identify what's getting in the way, because in this practice, that becomes my meditation object. And that's going to provide the entry into deeper practice.

Now sometimes, what's getting in the way is obvious. For example, I might be struck by a massive thought attack. Have you ever had one of those on a meditation retreat? Or what's getting in the way might be very subtle—might be a slight shift in mood, like a generalised restlessness with nothing that can be identified as being wrong. Something has changed within the heart-mind and that's where I need to be paying attention.

So I might push myself through all the motions but that won't get me very far. What I need to do is to cultivate intimacy and to feel: what is this? What is going on? And if I do that I may discover something quite unexpected. For example, I may find that self—when it appears as a concern with success and failure, or when it appears as an identification with habitual responses—that self blocks intimacy. And self is always characterized by separation or conceit, māna. This can appear disguised as something very subtle, as a felt sense of "this is happening to me." In other words, there is an "I" separate from the experience. There is someone to whom this experience is happening, and this someone is either a very good practitioner—wombat stamps for me—or a bad practitioner, whatever miserable number of wombat stamps I've managed to accumulate having all been taken away. But either movement is māna, and it blocks the progress.

So let's look at just two examples of blocks in the practice that are very common in retreats. One is restlessness, such as revealed in a sudden outburst of thinking, and the other is dullness, such as revealed in a tendency to zone out.

One thing that commonly happens during a retreat is that a practitioner is building concentration, things are calming down, and suddenly there's a thought explosion for no apparent reason. What this has to do with is what the Buddha calls air element, or what in the yoga tradition is called prāṇa, or what in general language we tend to call energy. What can happen is I've been building energy throughout the practice and at some point the body-mind can't handle it and it blows up. The energy's got to do something so it'll

just generate huge amounts of thought, burning itself off.

Now, if I'm just focused on the technique and on my success or failure with the technique, then all I can see is that suddenly I can't do it. I was doing the practice successfully this morning and now it's impossible. Oh my God, I've blown it.

It's a complete disaster. So what to do? Well, I should try harder. I'll just focus more. But this doesn't work because it's more likely to just blow up in my face. So I'm in a pickle.

What I could do is read the sign of my own mind. What's happening? Well, a lot of thinking. Okay, what's the characteristic of the thinking? For example, is there an emotional obsession? That will generate a lot of thinking. No, I'm not obsessed about anything at the moment. I've got this determination to think, and I don't care what I think about. I've just got to think about something. So could it be just energy? Well, it does feel very buzzy. And there is a sense of urgency. And it doesn't seem to matter what I'm thinking about. I just need to think. Energy—that's what it is.

So how do I work with energy? Well, the basic rule for excessive energy is to give it space. Room to move. Open the awareness up. It's like giving a wild horse a big paddock so that it can move about freely, but it's held within the boundaries of the paddock. In Australia, we'd say a horse. In India, of course, they'd say an elephant.

Now, as we said, samādhi is the state of being collected. So here it refers to the space within which the mind is collected being very wide, but the mind is collected within that space. It is bounded within that space. There's lots of space, but there's a sense of this is the boundary. It might be very wide, but it's held. It's contained.

And there's a safe distance between the aware-ing and the energy that is being aware. I don't go in, I step back, give it room, like watching it from a distance and not getting involved. I'm not paying any attention to what I'm thinking about—that's obviously not where the action is. I'm just feeling the energetic, buzzy feel of the flow of thinking itself. And as I do this, it starts to calm down. This is reading the sign of my own mind.

Or I might have an attack of dullness, which is the opposite. I sit down, I start to meditate, I build some concentration, and then the mind dulls out. And this is going to happen again and again. I may actually even fall asleep sitting upright. The meditation becomes impossible. I try again and again, but nothing works. I'm tempted to give up. It's too hard.

Or I could read the sign of my own heart-mind. If I get up and walk, for example, am I still dull? Well, if the answer is yes, then probably I'm sleepy. The best thing I can do is take a rest. So let's check it out. Try and see.

So I lie down, and very lightly, without making any effort, I feel the movements of the breathing. Now, if I

am tired, I will fall asleep. And then when I wake up, I resume, feeling refreshed. If I'm not tired, I will not fall asleep. And then I'm just doing a session of lying down meditation and finding a balance.

But let's say that I realize I'm dull only when I sit. All other times I'm perfectly awake, but when I sit, I get dull. So I can work on the assumption that the problem lies with my approach to the meditation practice.

Firstly, what is my meditation object? Is it the breathing? And often it is, in this particular situation. Perhaps my relationship to breathing causes an imbalance between energy and concentration. Well, actually, one thing to check—to see if it is the breathing—is to check whether the dullness emerges on the in-breath or the out-breath. Often when people are complaining about dullness, the first thing I would do is ask that very question. And if they say, "I don't know," I frown. And I say, "Please come back in the next interview and tell me. Pay attention."

But often it's on the out-breath, because it's on the out-breath that the body relaxes. And so if there is an imbalance, that's where you'll see it.

One way of testing this is to drop breathing as a meditation object and use the posture itself as the grounding object. Let go of the breathing, construct the posture really upright, open but relaxed, and then move my point of awareness from one sensation to another to another—always looking for the clearest, most obvious sensation, what we were playing with in the beginning.

Now, I'm moving the point of awareness from one place to another. I don't know where the next one is going to be because I don't know where the next obvious sensation will be. So I have to be paying attention. And the moving of the point of awareness itself requires energy and it generates energy. If I find that things are beginning to stabilize, I can say, "Oh, that's it." And I may find, after a while, that the breathing just kind of comes back into view. In which case, okay, just stay with it lightly, and as soon as there's a touch of dullness, drop it. Come back to moving from one point to another. This is what Mahasi Sayadaw calls sitting touching.

Sometimes there might be a variation. For example, let's say I keep with the breathing, but if I realize I get dull on the out-breath, I weave: in-breath, body sensation, in-breath, body sensation, in-breath, body sensation—just avoiding the out-breath until I can feel the energy coming back into balance.

Now, these are two quite common examples. But the key point is that no one can tell you what to do. There's an unpredictability and a creativity that's part of this whole project. So I try something. Like the cook who follows the recipe and discovers that her customers don't like the dish. Why? That's never happened. We'll try it again. No, it doesn't work. Something's changed. I have to abandon the recipe and try something new.

So we have a basic method, usually quite simple. And the method gives us a framework for the practice, a structure against which we can read the experience. And we also have a language. So we can speak with others about what happens during the meditation practice and understand them, but also we can speak to

ourselves and understand ourselves when we're analyzing what's going on.

What is our relationship to this method? We play with it. Because this is how we learn. No one can predict what the mind will come up with. So learning to read the sign of your own mind and adapting the practice to the situation—this is what distinguishes the capable practitioner from the incapable practitioner.

In other words, this is about the craft and understanding involved in meditation practice. Meditation is a craft, and you will get better at it over time if you apply your intelligence to the job. But some people don't.

Sometimes, for example, in Asia it can be because practitioners have so much faith. "If I just do what the teacher says, everything will be fine"—even when, obviously, it isn't fine. But we have to bring our intelligence to the project.

And of course, all of us bring different sensitivities and different capabilities to this practice. I spent five years doing Zen in the late seventies and early eighties. I picked that up again years later, but that's a different story. I abandoned Zen and went back to the Theravāda, and eventually stumbled into Burma. The reason why I left Zen was that they didn't really teach how to meditate. It was all the poetry and the realization and the mystical stuff, but there was precious little about the actual technique.

And some people got it. Some of my colleagues from those days are now Zen teachers, and I'm just astonished that they could somehow intuit their way into a deep meditation practice. I couldn't. There's no way I could have learned it that way. I needed someone to teach me the craft. And that's what I found in Burma. So that's what I've tried to specialize in—teaching the craft.

We begin the practice, and at first we're just absorbed with simply holding on to the meditation object. Later, as things calm down, we begin to realize that there is a lot more going on than we previously thought—a lot more than just hanging on to a meditation object. In this case, the Buddha is emphasizing how important it is to understand what is happening in the heart-mind and adapt the method accordingly. This requires creativity, learning to deal with the unexpected, and of course it also involves taking responsibility for our own experience.

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