

Practice makes perfect.*

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 2 min read

Practice is repetition. Think of the tennis player, the piano player, the actor. Indeed even if you want to become proficient on the keyboard, you have to practice. I myself have become fairly proficient in the two finger technique! Now we can't just practice for the sake of practice. Repetition would be meaningless if the aim was simply to repeat and repeat. It would be a hell realm. Consider the punishment of Sisyphus, 'the king of Ephyra (now known as Corinth). He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it come back to hit him, repeating this action for eternity' (Wikipedia). That's tough! There has to be an aim, a purpose. And it's the purpose which should give us the courage and tenacity to keep up the practice. Again bring to mind the dedication of Olympic athletes. In this sense we should endeavour to be spiritual athletes. Luckily this does not need physical prowess or intellectual brilliance – in fact we don't need any special talent at all. What we need is confidence in the vision that we are capable of perfect contentment and happiness. To achieve this, the Buddha has given us a technique, vipassana and instructions on how to maintain Right Mindfulness in ordinary daily life. It all boils down to this Right Awareness. And when he talks of living the life guided by the Dhamma, it is always based on the virtues – the emphasis being on Metta, that universal quality of good will to all beings. In our sitting practice, the repetition starts with settling on the breath. And then to repeatedly bring ourselves back to the presenting event – what's actually happening now. That's the practice. Insights arise naturally into the three spiritual gateways of awakening – understanding how we create suffering, experiencing the reality of impermanence and realising the false identities and possessions we are creating. Insights are not shattering experiences, but moments or recognition, of acknowledgement, most reinforcing, deepening what we have already seen. In ordinary daily life, this mindfulness is conjoined with ethical behaviour and the very life we lead is the practice. Much of our daily life is repetitious. The morning ablutions, the eating, the job and so on. And yet, of course, each event is just that little bit different from the rest. Even so the practice is bringing 'this-moment-attention' to bear with a good heart. When we have an aim, all repetition becomes meaningful. But that doesn't translate into dedication. That comes by exercising the virtues – raising enthusiasm and resolve. A real heart-felt commitment. Resolute practice underpins awakening. If all we have is the aim, some vision as to the future attainment, and no practice. Then the spiritual life enters the world of fantasy and disappointment. The Buddha did not become Buddha by aspiration alone.* Seemingly this phrase is coined from a man who is a legend in American Football coaching, Vince Lombardi. He actually said: Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.

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