

Constant Curiosity Carl

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Tips of the Day · 3 min read

At the end of a retreat, it's common for people to wonder how they can continue the practice once they return to normal life. It's also common for people to observe that the instructions don't easily map to daily life, I mean, how are we supposed to go slow and note everything while running for the bus or negotiating a business deal?! For me, though, this is to mistake the form of the practice for the heart. The instructions while we're sitting are to watch whatever arises within the field of awareness in a way that does not control or manipulate, judge or question and, without any interference whatsoever, simply allow it to arise and pass away. The great Thai lay teacher, Upasika Kee, calls this "unentangled knowing". This is the heart of the practice. When we have a difficult emotion arise, we contact it in the body - feel the feelings in the feelings—and then watch it in this way of unentangled knowing. The Buddha's first two noble truths tell us that there is suffering (dukkha), and that this is caused by craving (tanhā). We are constantly dissatisfied with our experience and feel a compulsion to fiddle and faff about with it, trying to make it somehow better. We want things to be other than they are. The instructions, on retreat, are to simply watch this as described above, but the problem is how to do this in normal daily life. By this, I don't mean on the cushion, where the instructions are exactly the same, but when walking down the road, or immediately after a verbal collision with an ornery work colleague. The way to bring the heart of the practice into everyday life is to nurture a curious, investigative attitude that takes interest in how we are suffering, to see what we're clinging to so that we may then observe it from this place of unentangled knowing. When you find yourself struggling with a difficult emotion, ask yourself what you are clinging to; what do you want to be different, to be other than it is? Don't just accept the first answer, dig in. Imagine you find yourself angry with someone. Ask yourself, "What's causing this anger?" Your answer may be "They're an unsavory character!" Nope! Keep digging! Remember, nobody can make us feel anything; we 'choose' how we respond. "Okay, it's because their attack brought about a feeling of injustice." Better, but dig in further! "Okay, this feeling of injustice is because I feel unrecognised and disrespected." Even better, but you can go further! "Feeling unrecognised and disrespected makes me afraid that I am worthless." Excellent, but how does that make you feel? "This feeling of worthlessness, that I resent, has an underlying feeling of needing to be appreciated, liked, accepted and loved." That's brilliant! Get in touch with that feeling, feel it in the body, and then try to just accept it being there, allow its energy to dissipate without any interference whatsoever. Of course, all of this is hard. You may find yourself unable to dig all the way to the bottom. That's fine, just find the answer that feels the most real to you and sit with that. Of course, the sitting with it is hard too. This is where the sitting practice pays dividends. It's why it's called practice! The more we practice, the easier this becomes, and the mindfulness we develop helps us to catch these moments without the angry retort in the first place. As you develop this, keep it going at all times; be

constantly curious! When you find yourself reacting strangely to an advert, investigate. When you find yourself tightening in a meeting, investigate. Positive or negative; seeing lovers kiss, babies cry, dog poo on the floor, flowers in bloom, strewn rubbish, children happily playing, whatever it is, investigate. Dig in and see if you can come to an equanimous and compassionate accommodation with whatever it is you uncover. The wonderful thing about this is that you don't need to be on the cushion to do it. You can do it at anytime, anywhere.

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