

WANTING TO TRAIN, OR NOT

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In my early years of Buddhist training, I came to understand, even long before I became a monk, that I had difficulty sustaining my practice. I simply had trouble wanting to do it. I remember a question I asked repeatedly: 'How do I manage to want to train?' It took me many years to see that a misunderstanding lies at the heart of this question. I had assumed that to train, it was necessary to want to, rather than to simply feel that I ought to. Underlying that was the basic belief that it was necessary, in some sense, to want to do anything that I did—or else why do it? This delusion was a large part of the source of my difficulty in maintaining the will to train. I knew that when I wanted to do something it came more easily. The energy, the will, tended to just be there. I felt comfortable with what I was doing. It was easier to get out of bed in the morning. It was easier to be bright and positive, and this was how I thought training should be. Whenever I wasn't, I would worry. I would worry that I was a bad trainee, that I was doing something wrong.

What I was essentially asking with my question 'How do I manage to want to train?' was 'How do I make it easier?' One of the reasons that training has always been difficult for me is because I don't want to do things that don't come easily or comfortably. Training is a growing, a changing, a willingness to forgo the security of the known and, therefore, may not be easy or comfortable. Accepting that can be difficult. To willingly sit still in the midst of discomfort, insecurity, or uncertainty may feel quite strange.

When we really begin to make an effort in anything, it is natural to notice resistance. We can look at this negatively, fall into anger or despair, be convinced that the resistance means that we are incapable, compare this with the lack of resistance we feel when we 'want' to do something, or we can see this as the beginning of broadening our limits, of opening ourselves to growth, and actually doing something about ourselves. The second choice is the compassionate one. It is allowing ourselves to do something without getting our opinions of 'like' or 'not like' in the way. Training is to do our best to sit still beneath these opposites; otherwise we will never allow ourselves to grow.

If you are one of those people who reacts to this resistance by giving up, by giving in to despair, or by just slowing down, then for once try putting in more energy, whether you feel like it or not, and just see what happens. If you are climbing a mountain and the resistance increases, you know that the effort must increase if you want to get to the top. It is your choice.

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