

Meditation and the Urge for Fulfillment

by Rodney Smith

The mark of sincerity for most spiritual practitioners is a yearning for completion, often expressed as a pull toward wholeness, freedom, or unity. This urge may feel like a deep and sometimes painful tug of the heart. The only way to satisfy its hunger is to engage in activity that moves toward greater interconnection. We feel fulfilled as we begin to connect to our inward experience and allow life to affect us. Intimacy becomes profoundly available as we release the boundaries that seem to divide the inward from the outward.

As the heart pulls toward more depth and understanding, the mind remains confused by this longing and continues to follow its course of consumption and avoidance. The heart finds these mundane activities superficial and devoid of meaning. As the journey unfolds, we seem to be pushed one way by the mind, another by the heart, yet mostly walk in some desolate landscape between the two. Walking the terrain between the heart and mind can be a challenging “dark night of the soul.”

It is important to understand the nature and derivation of this yearning of the heart or we can mentally distort the spiritual journey and lose our way. In the mentally derived world where most of us live, fulfillment comes from pursuing desires. Desire is the mental translation of the heart’s longing for completion. Desire tries to fulfill this longing through external means. It seeks to add or subtract from what is already present. Fulfillment comes in the future when the desired object is acquired, when our internal expectations are met. The mind does not embrace life for what it is but what it will become.

The mind attempts to distort our spiritual work by searching for wholeness outside the immediate moment. We look to authority figures, retreats, or the cultivation of refined states of mind for a sense of completion that seems so distant from our ordinary selves. Our spiritual journey becomes the pursuit of the mind’s idea of perfection. The present moment is a steppingstone to the next “more perfect” moment conceived in the mind’s imagination. When the next moment does occur it may contain unpleasant sensations that do not satisfy our image of contentment. This compels us to continue searching.

Meditation is finding contentment regardless of the conditions that are arising. The heart’s path is very different than the cultural way we define fulfillment as

enhancing pleasure and avoiding pain. Since every experience is finite in duration, intensity, and satisfaction, we cannot rely on any experience to confirm our spiritual journey. The less time we spend validating our life through experience, the more we will begin to identify with the awareness that holds all experience. This shift in identity begins the passage toward true fulfillment.

Through bare attention, we see that one side of the pain/pleasure principle cannot exist independently of the other. The entire scale of worldly conditions (pleasure/pain, gain/loss, success/failure, and praise/blame) is mutually dependent for definition. Seeking one, we avoid the other and sow the seeds for division and separation. Unless we accept life as a totality we attempt to patch together ongoing moments of pleasure that inevitably leads to pain.

The lesson that dawns on the sincere practitioner is that true fulfillment is not a piecemeal approach to reality. It is not found by searching for one experience after another or by controlling or eliminating anything. It is discovered in a total embrace of the here and now. The heart intrinsically knows this. The urge we feel comes from having lost the ground of our being by searching for conditions the world can never provide. We misinterpret the direction the urge is pointing. It is not a call to seek, add, or cultivate but a pull back into itself. It is the finger of Adam touching the finger of God in the Sistine Chapel. It is awareness seeking itself.

Meditation, when used in accordance with the Buddha's teaching of wise view (moving toward interconnection) and wise attitude, (allowing reality to be just what it is), directs us toward the true source of contentment. It does not allow the urge for fulfillment to move away from this moment because it knows truth is the embodiment of the moment. As we become quieter and less argumentative with reality, the source of stillness begins to reveal itself. That source is the ground of our being always waiting for the end of our search and the end of postponing what is eternally before our eyes.