



... It is really very impressive how many excuses we can invent for why we aren't sitting. This idea we have that when things are perfect, then we'll start practicing—things will never be perfect. This is samsara!...

...I remember once I was in the cave getting all depressed because the snows would melt in the spring and water would run down the back wall, making everything wet. Finally, I thought, "But didn't the Buddha tell us it was this way? What is the first noble truth, after all? What do we expect? Why make such a big fuss when we suffer?" After that, I didn't have any trouble. ...Call something an obstacle, it is an obstacle. Call it an opportunity, it is an opportunity. Nothing is extraneous to the spiritual life. This is very important to understand.

...Even the most awful things that happen, if you're centered, you'll be okay. If not, the most trivial thing will send you off. It has nothing to do with the experience or the circumstance: it is the attitude that's important. We have to stop clinging to the conditioned path and learn to be open to the unconditioned path.

...We think the ego is our best friend. It isn't. It doesn't care if we are happy or unhappy. In fact, ego is very happy to be unhappy. And we must be conscious of not using the spiritual path as another conduit for the ego—a bigger, better, more spiritual me.

...There are practices we can use against this ego-cherishing. In the company of very sick people who are suffering, one can visualize that one is taking in their fear and pain, in the form of dark light or smoke, pulling out sickness and negative karmas, and directing them toward the little black pearl of our self-concern. And it will start to disappear, because, really, the very last thing the ego wants is other people's problems.

If we do experience pain or suffering ourselves, we can use it. We're conditioned to resist pain. We think of it as a solid block we have to push away, but it's not. It's like a melody, and behind the cacophony there is tremendous spaciousness.

.... What do we do when thoughts arise in meditation? The thoughts are not the problem. Thoughts are the nature of the mind. The problem is that we identify with them.

What of emotions like anger? The Buddha said that it's greed, not anger, that keeps us on the wheel. Nobody's chaining us down: we're clinging on with both hands. Many people come to me saying that they want to eradicate anger; it's not difficult to see that anger makes us suffer. But very rarely do people ask me how to be rid of desire.

We have to cultivate contentment with what we have. We really don't need much. When you know this, the mind settles down. Cultivate generosity. Delight in giving. Learn to live lightly. In this way, we can begin to transform what is negative into what is positive. This is how we start to grow up.

...Our mind is a treasure. But it's very absorbent, so we must also be very discriminating in what we hear, read, and see. And in the spiritual life, our fence is our ethics. If we know we are living ethically to the best of our ability, the mind will become peaceful. We will attract the same kinds of people we really are. If we have a mind full of defilements, we will attract that to us. Therefore we have to purify our mental state, because whatever is within we will project out. You bring people toward you by your work and by karma....

But if the Buddha were here, all he could encourage you to do would be to practice. Nobody else can do our work for us—it's up to us to do it or not. Swimming upstream toward the source takes effort and determination. Sorry, there is no quick fix. But in the end it is the only thing that's worthwhile. The key is practice. But don't put it on the shrine: take the key, open the door, and walk out of the prison. There are no obstacles.