

Process of Illumination

What if you are practicing mindfulness and awareness and life situations keep going on and there is no dramatic breakthrough? You may be in the middle of multiple situations that require your continued effort and work and your light bulb of awakening does not seem to ignite. Edison when asked if he believed he had failed when it took 1000 thousand different attempts at finding the filament that was finally discovered as the element that matched the needs for the light bulb as a product. He responded, the story goes by stating that these were not seen as failures, but rather as mounting evidence of what did not work- which then could be eliminated from the search.

In mindfulness our sustained effort, over time, requires that we face our obstacles of impatience, self criticism, futility, sadness, loss, craving, expectation, loss, grief, habits and structures of ego, weight of experience, pain, isolation, mind-stuff (especially the spinning of stories, narrative and associated thought contents and shame/remorse/guilt repeatedly without knowing (uncertainty) whether we may find the "right filament," to illuminate our way. This process of elimination then becomes our process of illumination. Like Edison, perhaps what we need to do is be able to start fresh at the moment we recognize that we have stumbled so that we can be with that moment as it is- both a recognition that we are still making an effort, and oddly how not having attained this illusive non-goal as an opportunity to refresh some purpose that may be found in the being with the dilemma.

This is astounding is it not, that we can discover being lost as a sign that we are somewhere? Recent inquiries in Psychology ask the question is happiness not different from meaning? We are often happy for a moment and then it seems to fade. The quest to find these moments and make them last longer can at times develop unhappiness brilliantly leading to extremes- I was happy at the party after I had a beer, maybe two this time will return me to that state. On the other hand meaning can transcend times of happiness. Meaning can be with us even during ups and downs- as long as it becomes the basis for the renewal of our purpose. There are steps and requirements to get to that meaning and often they are operating in the being with emotion as it unfolds whether it is your own emotion, or those you are involved with. Here again there are repetitions of a process, being with and letting go. In our practice we have worked with this as a basic drill in the "Body Scan." We know this as a strengthening platform for everyday inner work.

Traditional texts point to deepening the practices of awareness and meditation by way of stillness and focus that gradually, over time can be sustained. The framework is compassion that is gradually developed, as it can be the bridge to cross the hurdles of the abovementioned obstacles. A concise way of framing this is found in the Buddha's statement, "Obstacles are not in your way, they are your way." Our practice toward deepening levels of stillness and focus then moves freely in and out of a variety of situations and responses, inner and outer requiring a renewal of an effort that is not about attainment, but rather finding what we have been told already exists-peace with what already is as is. It is a process of illumination.