

“Collecting Gold Dust”

A selection of Sayadaw U Tejaniya’s suggestions for bringing awareness practice into daily life

Daily life will be full of ups and downs when greed, anger, delusion and all their relatives come on strong. How do you approach such situations? The first step is to accept whatever is happening in the mind as it is. Accept that this is just the nature of the mind. Unless you accept, you will be fighting defilements with defilements.

There is a temporary end to suffering, and there is an ultimate end to suffering. We have to pay the price accordingly. Some things come easily and are cheaper. We will have to pay a higher price for something more valuable.

Don't force something to happen. This goes against nature. You can't get something just because you want it or you work for it. There are two things that can move us forward: how much we do and how skillful we are. Pay attention to applying skill and to right effort—these deserve our attention.

When yogis observe defilements, it is often from a point of view that they are enemies to be fought. That is already a battle lost. Defilements like it when you fight, because fighting is itself a defilement.

My teacher would always ask me how I was practicing, and that is what I'm asking you now. What are you doing? What is special or different today? Yogis who are practicing will have an answer; those who are not practicing will not.

Let things unfold naturally. Your job is to watch, know, learn, and gain experience. As you watch an experience continually, you will begin to recognize patterns. Later you will see the whole picture. The value of meditation becomes more apparent with dedicated practice over long stretches of time.

What is happening in the mind and what is happening in the body right now? How is one mental state related to another mental state? You want to be interested in the nature of this mind and body. Hold concepts and story lines to the side.

As wisdom gains traction and defilements thin out, you'll see that there aren't that many problems per se. "Problems" arise when there is a lot of greed,

aversion or delusion present. When we can't accept things as they are, we exhaust ourselves with desire for things that are not present, or with desire to push away things that are already there.

If we think that a certain experience is lingering longer than we'd like, we're not observing properly. No two moments are the same. Every moment is fresh and every moment is changing.

If you merely follow my instructions without conducting your own investigation, wisdom won't arise in you. You need to learn to the point where you personally understand why you need to act in certain ways.

There are two aspects of moral conduct: the doing of what should be done, and the not doing of what should not be done. The Five and Eight Precepts that we always talk about is abstaining from that which should not be done. Remember that there is also the other side: do as much as possible of what should be done.

In my experience, my behavior changed through continuous practice. I became very calm and spoke very little, or not at all if it was not important. I was serious when I did talk. Being very careful in my speech became important in my practice. I practiced refraining from lying, slander, gossip, talking nonsense, speaking harshly, and idle chatter. And as a result, my meditation deepened.

When yogis successfully observe something unwholesome and it passes, they are happy. But that's not the end. It's important to reflect what would have happened if we had not been mindful. If we are just happy in la la land, we don't get to learn what it is like to be unmindful.

I usually tell yogis to stay away from the storyline, but it can help to see the idea that the story carries. The story might be, "Anne was making noise and I was really angry with her," while the idea behind it might be, "People shouldn't make noise." This idea influences the mind. When it is seen clearly for what it is, and that it's not helpful, this idea can be let go.

You need to have your eyes open while meditating in daily life. I learned how to be aware with my eyes open because fellow shopkeepers used to tease me when I meditated at work with my eyes closed. They thought I was

sleeping on the job! So I learned to pay attention to the internal landscape while keeping my eyes open. I eventually became more skillful at knowing the difference between seeing and looking, and the people I worked with didn't even know that I was meditating.

All six sense doors are at work when you eat. Do you know everything that is happening? If you forget yourself while you are eating, there will be a lot of eagerness there. Eating often has a kind of excitement and eagerness that accompanies it. So before you start eating, check to see if there is eagerness. When this excitement calms down, awareness will become steadier.

When we do not understand the reality of seeing, we may get lost in the things we see instead of recognizing that seeing is happening. Seeing is such an obvious object that we may not recognize it as such, simply because we don't yet understand it.

Thinking in the right way is part of the practice. To do any kind of work we need to consider the situation, reflect, and think. We use wisdom to make fewer mistakes and we actively reflect on what's productive and useful in our practice. This helps us recognize what's helpful and strengthen that. When we are observing, experiencing and thinking about how to practice, it all comes together.

The thinking mind in itself is neither wholesome nor unwholesome. It is the motivation behind the thinking, whether of defilement or wisdom, that determines the quality of the thought.

When there are strong wholesome qualities in the mind, it is difficult for the mind to suddenly change and become unwholesome. When there is a strong unwholesome train of thought going on, it's difficult for it to suddenly switch and become wholesome. I experimented for myself once when my mind was wholesome. I tried to intentionally think negative thoughts and realized that I could not.

If you can see the intention to think, know that. Observe the intensity of the intention. When, through skillful observation, the intention diminishes, the thoughts will also diminish. If you can't see the intention to think just switch back and forth between thoughts and body as objects.

You can expend a lot of mental energy speculating about the future without actually knowing what is going to happen. If a very different outcome unfolds from what you had expected, you have spent a lot of energy on imagination.

Planning is necessary but can be done with either defilements or wisdom. Do you worry when you're planning? Some people plan with greed and others with anxiety. But there is a way to think and plan in a relaxed way.

The market where I had my shop was a very busy place. Lots of shops were lined up side-by-side, with narrow alleys between them. People would run through blindly, and I got irritated when I had to get out of the way, which was often! When I began to practice continuously, I became mindful of my irritation. I began to see moving aside as a good practice both to prevent accidents, and to offer generosity. As I practiced day after day, mindfulness built and good actions followed. The aversion decreased and with the aversion gone, I began to feel loving-kindness for the people.

There will always be some kind of contact at the six sense doors. Don't follow any such contact. Just know the state of mind and stay with the knowing, observing mind. How does the mind feel or react every time there is contact at the sense doors? Is there a resistance? You may not necessarily let go and accept the situation initially, but that's fine because you are using this experience as a tool to develop skill in meditation.

In daily life, where wisdom may be weak, you want to pay attention to awareness. The mind can recognize the situation happening while awareness naturally collects data in the background. As awareness picks up more data from the experience, and the picture become complete and wholesome minds become stronger, you will eventually stop acting out of defilements.

You may learn a technique at a retreat, but it's only when you go home that you can apply that technique continuously, all the time. That's when your life changes.

from "Collecting Gold Dust" by Sayadaw U Tejaniya. This book may be downloaded free at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bMVtHlEQ0sj4OobCG7eP7FfsmrjIm6N9/>