

Five reasons why recollecting your meditation sittings is essential for developing an open, unstructured meditation practice

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One

When we intentionally recollect what occurred during a meditation sitting, our memory of what happened during it improves. Not only that, we can then value the kinds of positive experiences meditation brings, such as periods of calmness, clarity, greater tolerance of difficult emotions and insights into how the mind operates.

This way of remembering positive developments in our meditation practice can create more trust and confidence in the meditative process as well as greater recognition of these positive experiences when they arise.

Two

We make things out of our meditative experiences. That is natural. We experience a deep state of peace and turn it into an ultimate state of mind that we now want to be in all of the time. On the other end of the spectrum, we feel sad, lonely, and forlorn and then worry about slipping into depression.

By recollecting our experiences in meditation and either writing them down or talking about them with a teacher (or in a group), we may become more aware of what we have made out of our experiences and be able to question these narratives.

If we don't recall the narratives that are created in meditation, we will most likely be subject to them. However if we do recall them and look into them, we may become interested in exploring them further and find ourselves believing them less and less.

Three

We tend to use particular words and phrases to describe our experiences. We may be able to catch ourselves using particular labels while meditating, but for the most part we won't become fully aware of how much credence we give these labels until we begin writing down our sittings.

The meditation journal itself can be investigated to see how often we use certain words and phrases and we may even notice that we have difficulty articulating some

types of experience but not others. When we have more detailed descriptions of our meditative experiences in our own words, we can then know what we know about them and what we still have doubts and questions about.

Until then, we are operating on the assumption that our experiences somehow match or conform to the labels we have used to categorise them. That is not a place of self-knowledge, at least of the depth and breadth needed to comprehend what keeps certain thoughts, feelings, habits, behaviours and intentions alive and active.

Four

In an open meditation practice, such as recollective awareness meditation, we can slip into tranquil states that have a sleep-like or trance-like quality. When we emerge from these states, we may not be able to remember much, even though we may have felt somewhat aware of what was going on during them. Recollecting what can be easily recalled about these experiences can aid in the development of more awake and aware tranquil states.

The kind of recollection that is done with these hard-to-recall experiences is to start with something that can be easily remembered. We might be able to recall if there were any images, sounds, words, thoughts, or bodily sensations. On occasions we may even sense that there was some kind of subtle vibration, texture, or mood present during parts of the sitting. Most likely, only bits and pieces will be recollected, and that is enough.

Five

Recollecting the meditation sitting afterward is done instead of trying to do a specific meditation technique or apply a strategy. Instead of trying to do a technique to create some kind of tranquillity, we allow the mind to find its own way of settling down and then, after the meditation sitting, we recollect how that came about.

The same holds true for other aspects of our meditation sittings, such as how we went through some difficult emotions, a long stretch of repetitive thoughts, a period of boredom, agitation, or confusion. Only by recollecting how we went through such experiences will we know the choices that were made and how they came about, thus informing us as to how the meditative process works in our meditation practice – it is not just letting go and trusting in a flow, but a complex process of navigating our dynamic and delicate inner world.

U.S. recollective awareness meditation teacher Linda Modaro will be visiting NZ in November 2016, running workshops in the North Island and the South Island. For more information write to: events@simplymeditation.org.nz.