

Effort and relaxation

Most of us know how to make effort based on tension. On retreat, each person can experiment with making 'reversed effort', or effort based on relaxation.

At the beginning with meditation, and periodically later on, a struggle with strong habits of mind is unavoidable. But don't assume that this same quality of exhausting effort must continue. At first, our effort is choppy because all we have to work with is the on-and-off thinking mind to pay attention.

But the kind of effort most often needed is like the effort to hold a rose petal in the palm of your hand: not force, but rather a continuity of remembrance like a river. This continuity comes naturally as we access self-motivation and restfulness.

Self-motivation

Remember when you did something just because you wanted to --not because you thought you had to, and not because you wanted to get money, prestige, or acceptance. You will remember how good it felt.

On retreat, we have a chance to find self-motivation and to experience its joy. You don't need an exciting pastime, with which you to "fill up" this "empty" time. We can "do nothing" and let life emerge. We can enact love towards ourselves in small, concrete ways, even if it seems silly. Each evening we can write down five joyful moments of the day, and gradually learn to let the joy lead. We can also remember what we love to do most, and immerse ourselves in that in some way without disturbing the group silence.



Restfulness

Resting is an art. We try to relax, but don't know how. We often think we should do “more important” things first, so that we can later deserve to rest. But somehow the time for rest never comes. Bringing freshness, energy, health, radiance, and friendliness, rest benefits meditation tremendously. Start with an attitude of ease or with lying down for meditation.

Even if you fall asleep, that refreshing rest may be more beneficial than holding yourself in a rigid sitting posture, as if you are working at an office (and practicing aversion). In fact, the meditation that happens after you awaken is likely to be fresh and bright, closer to genuine meditation than trying too hard.

