

## Stay Tuned



**Tuning our practice, as Reverend Zuiko Redding explains here, is a moment-to-moment endeavor.**

*The wind is chilly* and the window above my desk is open. The cats, San Bon and Ananda, like it that way. For them, open windows provide better bird watching, perhaps because they can smell and hear through the screen. Soon I won't be able to accommodate them. The leaves on the new burr oak are falling. Days are shorter. Autumn is certainly here.

With fall's arrival, I long to get up later and sit less and not worry about being aware as I go through the day. After all, dealing with the cold and the dark takes a lot of energy. Is it this way with you, too?



One of the sutras in the Pali Canon (AN 6.5) tells the story of Sona, who also was having trouble with practice. Leaving his family to follow the Buddha, Sona made really intense efforts to get rid of his egoistic thoughts. Although he practiced intensely, his judgments and ideas stayed with him. He got pretty discouraged. Here he was, wandering the forest in a robe made of used cloth

patches, sleeping under a tree, eating whatever he was given, sitting until his rear hurt, doing walking meditation until his feet bled, and he was getting nowhere. Maybe he should go home, he thought, give up the monk's life. His family would be jubilant at his return. He could enjoy all the comforts of a wealthy son and still gain merit by serving the monks.

Seeing Sona's concerns, the Buddha went to him and asked about his troubles. The Buddha said, "Before, when you were a householder, you were skilled at playing the vina (an ancient musical instrument, like a sitar), weren't you?"

"Yes, lord," Sona answered.

"And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were too taut, did it play well?"

“No, lord.”

“And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were too loose, did it play well?”

“No, lord.” “And what do you think? When the strings of your vina were neither too taut nor too loose, but tuned to be right on pitch, did it play well?”

“Yes, lord.”

It’s the same with human beings, the Buddha suggested. If our effort is too much we want to give up and if it’s too slack we become lazy. If we constantly tune our effort according to our capability and our changing conditions, then we can maintain it.

Whether we are householders or ordained people, it’s the same. Sometimes we decide to make a huge effort –maybe to sit at least an hour daily, or to sit at least twice a week at a Zen Center. After a few days of juggling zazen, family, work and such, we become tired and dispirited. We quit in defeat. These kinds of efforts are the products of our concepts and our desires to be a “good person” or to get some reward like “enlightenment,” so they’re difficult to maintain.

Or we may say to ourselves, like Sona, that family life and helping Zen Center is enough. It’s OK not to sit—I have so many commitments. I’ll drop awareness—I’m too busy to worry about being awake in the midst of all my activity. I’ll do all that later. Soon, ego takes over and we are again enslaved by thoughts and desires.

What to do? Let go of ideas like “hard practice,” or “good practice,” or even “practice” and negotiate practice moment by moment. In other words, we tune our practice in each moment so that it harmonizes with our life.

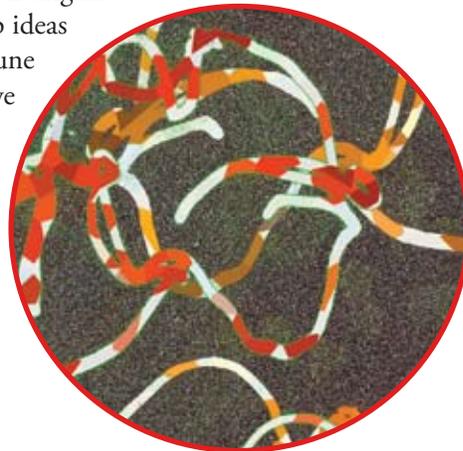
Like tuning an instrument, tuning our practice is beyond ideas and notions.

Tuning an instrument is a matter of making a small adjustment, listening, then making another small adjustment.

When each string sounds the proper note, we stop. It’s the same in daily life. We make an adjustment, listen to our lives, make another adjustment. We know we’re doing OK when the sound of our lives is harmonious. We are neither too taut in our practice nor too loose.

Of course, as conditions change, strings become tighter or looser and we have to tune them again. In daily life it’s the same—circumstances change, harmony drifts off and we have to adjust again.

Tuning means that in each moment we make an effort to be present beyond our concepts of “too much” and “not enough.” Being in tune also means giving up ideas about rewards—being in tune is just being in tune. As we do this, our lives balance themselves. When we do zazen we do zazen, when we are not doing zazen we are awake—we’re here with whatever is in front of us.



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