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## REST

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**A**fter reading about self-existing awareness, vajra being, and crazy wisdom, a simple topic like rest might seem out of place. But the fact is, rest is a constant and important part of the Buddhist path, and it manifests in unexpected and helpful ways. Shang Rinpoche gives us a sense of the importance of rest to meditation:

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A relaxed mind is all that is necessary. Perfect meditation will arise in a perfectly relaxed mind. A middling meditation will arise in a semi-relaxed mind. The least kind of meditation will arise in the least relaxed mind.

*Mahamudra and Related Instructions, 78.*

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It's helpful to know, as a start, that effort plays a different role in the world of insight than in the everyday world. In the usual world, effort is how we solve problems; but in the enlightened one, effort *creates* problems, by intruding on the unobstructed nature of enlightened mind.

This statement, counterintuitive as usual, raises the question of how we can live without earning money, buying groceries, caring for loved ones, and everything else that life demands. And that question brings us back to rest itself—because if we really know how to rest mind, we can do all those things and rest at the same time.

So how do we rest? The answer is not a sandy beach and palm trees or billions in the bank, but by divesting ourselves of attachments. We don't have to buy airline tickets or start a hedge fund to rest mind; we can do it in each moment, by sitting in meditation and relaxing our attachments to the thoughts and emotions that disturb us. Then, we can go shopping with a mind that is completely unruffled by parking, checkout lines, and so on. When we learn how to recognize and drop attachments, we can rest under all circumstances.

When we attempt to divorce ourselves from grasping, however, the problem we immediately face is that

*trying* to eliminate grasping creates an attachment to eliminating it. This dilemma reminds me of a statement I heard early in the Dharma, and of which I grew tired: “We already are what we seek.” I always thought, *What does it matter if we are, if we can’t find it?* Nevertheless, as galling as hearing it repeated is, the statement is true. We already are rest, and to find it we simply have to let go of attachments, and not try to push them away.

The best way to do that is—you guessed it—meditation. Using mindfulness-awareness practice, we begin to shift from our preoccupations with thoughts, emotions, and other activities of mind and effortlessly return to the present. Each time we do so, we rest; in fact, we may even feel our body relax as we come back. If we observe closely, we also discover that returning from grasping happens naturally, without any element of effort or trying. We begin to see that both returning to and being in the now are restful, and that wrestling with our attachments is really what stresses us.

In all this, the real villain is our karma. For a very long time, our approach to life has been to try. We continue this pattern in Buddhism, striving to learn and understand new terms, new rituals, and new ways to interact with others and with the teacher. All this takes effort—which we later learn is harmful to

our progress. It doesn't seem fair; after all, "we are doing the best we can."

From a Dharmic perspective, however, we are reinforcing our karma, and that is an activity not suited to the Dharma, as Suzuki Roshi makes clear:

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If you are trying to attain enlightenment, you are creating and being driven by karma, and you are wasting your time on your black cushion.

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, 99.

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Because of the power of our karma, at the beginning of our journey on the Buddhist path we exert great effort to learn how to rest. For example, we may wish to see the true nature of mind so that we can find peace, and so we apply ourselves assiduously to meditation, practicing it over and over, year after year. Fortunately, with meditation, we have chosen the best approach to resting. Even though our motivation is flawed, the method we've picked is working unobtrusively to our benefit. Unbeknownst to us, our efforts are setting a trap for ego, the source of our inability to rest.. Ego is trying as hard as it can—employing Dharmic methods designed to remove ego. As it searches for insight, it meditates more, studies the Dharma further, and bonds more

closely with the teacher, all activities that lead to its eventual demise and the emergence of restfulness.

Meditation shows us that all our efforts don't work. We continue to return to the places that restrict our freedom, such as overwhelming emotions or selfish endeavors. At some point, practice awakens us enough to realize that trying is ineffectual—or maybe worse than ineffectual, increasing our crankiness, puffing us up with how hard we practice, or making us arrogant about what we've learned. Finally, we see that attaining enlightenment cannot be done, and we give up and just rest in the present. When we relax, and mind is cleared of striving, it begins to see itself more clearly. We start to get somewhere by going nowhere.

At that point, we begin to relinquish our egocentric approach to the Dharma and to relax; and that allows us, at last, to obtain a clearer view of the mind we have been attempting to see. The Dharma has no equal in fooling ego. When it is successful, we discover mind and the restfulness it contains.

In my own life, I spent many years practicing the Dharma so that I could rest my mind from its constant worries. Meditating in this way worked sometimes—and sometimes it caused me to struggle more, as sitting and watching concerns arise again and again intensified them. For a long period, not even

meditation guaranteed me restfulness. Desperate for enlightenment to rescue me from my psychological struggles, I endured years of chronic irritation, with ego trying to attain enlightenment and judging its progress. It was a constant, nagging presence that never relented.

All this effort was not wasted, though, because it proved to me that I would never be able to find enlightenment by searching. After twenty years, I finally gave up, and I found what I was seeking—and with it, rest, both in meditation and life.

Up to this point, we have been discussing rest from the unenlightened viewpoint, and have found it difficult to accomplish. With enlightenment, the situation couldn't be more different. Enlightenment is effortless, so rest need not be sought. Self has long since disappeared, along with other, and we have become the world, so we no longer have to deal with the feeling of the world opposing us. We can relax.

We have become a limitless space, without borders to inhibit us or anything outside to influence us. Also, since we are empty, nothing can impact us; and being eternal, we require no maintenance. We don't have to do anything, because we are everything. We no longer try to listen or see, because we *are* listening and seeing themselves, and every other experience that occurs. We are a space that knows and observes;

thoughts and emotions ripple within that space, and then the space returns to itself. We are like a waterfall, which doesn't work at falling but simply does what waterfalls do. Enlightenment is what we truly are and always have been, but didn't realize. As such, we don't have to work at being it, and can simply rest in what we have realized.

Even at this point of advanced insight, we will be surprised to find that we still have not learned to rest completely. Despite being all the qualities of enlightenment just mentioned, we still leave that insight at times—and this causes us to *work* at staying in enlightenment, perhaps by paying more attention to body, the outbreath, or the distance of our gaze. We are still trying to drive the car of enlightenment, even though there is no we and no car.

This car metaphor is not mine, but comes to me from my teacher. At a talk he gave many years ago, I recall raising my hand to ask a question. (I wanted to be a star pupil, so I was asking questions, and of course he effortlessly read what my ego was doing, as only someone without one can.) He smiled, pointed over my head to a woman behind me, and asked her if she ever noticed the road coming to her.

Thirty-five years after my teacher's comment, I was meditating, and suddenly mind quit being "there," and started coming to me. At that point, I knew what

my teacher had meant by the road coming to us, and I understood the gift he had offered me years before. With it, I learned complete rest. Through all the insights I have mentioned throughout this book, there had always been the subtle taint of something being *done*. Now, insights were no longer being done; they were doing me.

When we stop driving down the road, and the road starts coming to us, adjustments to the car are no longer required. The road decides where we go, and the road is everything. In other words, all of life is coming to us now, and we don't have to do anything about it—just relax and enjoy the view. We are completely free from all trying, and there is only resting under all circumstances.

Rest is indispensable on both sides of enlightenment. We need rest to reach insight, and rest is a major element of insight itself. We are enlightenment—that is our true nature as a human—and we are meant to find total restfulness in that nature. However, in another bit of Dharmic illogic, we will have to work to relax. Only by working through mind's obstacles will we find the way to complete freedom and restfulness.