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## **Buddhist Meditation: Catching the Right Thought Train**

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By Anushka Fernandopulle

Consider your mind being like the platform of a train station where different trains of thought pull through the station in each moment, heading to various destinations: childhood memories, creative ideas, revenge fantasies, cravings for chocolate, vacation plans. The untrained mind gets on every single train that pulls through the station, only later realizing what the destination is. For instance, the "Jealousy Train" leads to a bleak wasteland -- fear, aggression, obsession, stalking your ex, burning garbage, large rodents -- you do not want to get on that train! On the other hand, the "Generosity Train" leads to a place that is spacious, happy, relaxed and connected. That's a good one to board.

The path of Buddhist meditation practice involves developing a deep understanding of what leads toward peace and happiness and what does not; what is in harmony with the truth of the way things are (Dharma) and what creates suffering by going against the grain. Wise effort involves cultivating intentions that are aligned with this goal (skillful states), abandoning those that are not (unskillful states) and knowing the difference.

Developing this skill is a lot like learning how to read; in this case, reading the mind, heart and body through knowing the energy of the intentions, emotions and thoughts that drive us in each moment. You may not remember what it was like to learn how to read, but it can take some time! I had the experience in my adult life of learning how to read another language. After I finished college, I spent time in Sri Lanka doing meditation practice at various monasteries and centers. While my family is originally from Sri Lanka, I was born and raised in the U.S., so though I could speak conversationally, I was not very good at reading Sinhalese language. I could read slowly like a small child, but certainly not fluently.

I traveled around a lot by bus, and in order to take the bus, you had to stand by the side of the road and when you saw your bus coming, flag it down to get on. The trouble was, my reading of the bus signs was too slow. I would see a bus coming and try to read the sign: "Co.....Lo...." Zoom! The bus would be gone before I could finish reading the destination. "Ku....Ru..." Zoom! Again I couldn't tell if it was the right bus or not. Sometimes I would guess based on the first two characters, flag the bus to get on and finish reading from the inside of the bus, stopping the bus as fast as I could if I had guessed wrong!

But as I studied the language more, I got better at reading. So after a while, I could read the signs well and easily know which was my bus and which was not. I spent less time

on buses going in the wrong direction and was able to have a smoother, faster trip to my intended destination; I traveled with less confusion and more confidence.

Similarly, as we develop our practice we can learn to get on the thought trains that are helpful and skip the ones that are not. And just like in a train station, if nobody is boarding the trains that go to a destination, they will stop running them so often, and eventually stop running them at all. This is known as the path of purification, and it is completely possible for a 21st century person to attain, if you are interested in learning.

Of course in the meantime you will often get on the wrong train, but each time can be seen as an opportunity to learn. You will spend a lot of time developing intimacy with difficult states of mind, connecting with their challenges. But you will also learn about the beautiful states of mind and the joy that they bring. Through this practice you will become more effective in whatever you are trying to do in your life: politics, social change work, parenting, business and creative arts all benefit from catching the right thought trains!

So I wish you well in your practice. Enjoy learning about your mind and heart! Your efforts will be beneficial for you and all those you meet for the rest of your life.

By Anushka Fernandopulle

Anushka Fernandopulle teaches Insight Meditation (Vipassana) in organizations and retreat centers around the United States. Anushka also works as an organizational development consultant and executive/leadership coach, with a BA from Harvard University and an MBA from Yale University. She is on the Teacher's Council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area where she serves as a Mayoral Appointee to San Francisco's Advisory Commission on Community Development. She has lifelong passion for social justice, music, arts, nature and the life of the city. For more info please see [www.anushkaf.org](http://www.anushkaf.org).

