

## INNATE AWARENESS

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By Michael Erlewine ([Michael@Erlewine.net](mailto:Michael@Erlewine.net))

This is an excerpt from a new “Spirit Grooves” video on awareness and how to develop it. The full video is here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ts-rva17yw&list=UU3cL8v4fkupc9lRtugPkkWQ&index=1>

If you ask most Buddhist practitioners what they do as regards meditation, they will say they are doing their practice. The accent should be on the word ‘practice’, because in the beginning we are practicing meditation, not meditating. True meditation comes later.

It took me years to understand this. I don’t know what I was thinking, but I guess I thought I was meditating, when in fact I had never really learned how. Actually I was practicing meditation, but hadn’t understood that was what I was doing, practicing.

Basic meditation requires that we develop some mental muscle-memory, the habit of the technique itself, something up to now we have never had. This takes time and, to use that word again, practice. This fact is often is not understood by those setting out to meditate. We don’t just instantly meditate.

The technique of meditation that we are learning here is like the scaffolding used to build a house. When the house is done, we take down the scaffolding. In this analogy, meditation is the house or goal, and the techniques of meditation, learning mindfulness as a habit, is the scaffolding. Here is an analogy.

If we want to learn to play a musical instrument such as a guitar, we have to learn to tune the guitar, the various ways to play cords, and of course musical scales. This is not the same as playing music. We must practice scales and tuning, etc. before we can play music. This is what I mean by practice. When we have practiced enough, then we can play music.

Meditation is like this, but with one big difference. When you learn to play the guitar, you know beforehand what the end result, music, sounds like. You can go and listen to music. With meditation, this is not true.

Meditation requires the same kind of practice, building muscle memory (albeit mentally) as learning the guitar, but with meditation we have no idea and no experience of what the end result we are working toward is like. We can’t play the music of awareness whenever we want. In fact, we may have little to no experience with enlightenment, awareness, and so forth personally. We are going only on what we have read and heard. And this is a big difference.

In fact, the expectations and assumptions we make about what the result of meditating is supposed to be often becomes the biggest obstacle to true meditation. We think we know what it is supposed to be like when, by definition, we do not. We compare our actual experience in practicing meditation to the idea we have built up about it, and usually come up short. That disappointment impinges on our practice.

I feel it is important for beginning meditators to admit to themselves that they have no idea what enlightenment, realization, or even much-greater awareness is like, because they don't know. That's why we are learning to meditate, but unlike music, we can't just put on a CD and hear the music of awareness. We have to have trust as in the movie "Field of Dreams," if we practice, awareness will come. And it will, but not if our expectations overpower it and cause us to throw in the towel.

In summary, meditation practice is just that 'practice', and not the goal of practice, which is meditation and the awareness it brings. Our meditation practice is like the training wheels on a kid's bike. Once we learn to actually meditate, we take the training wheels off and just meditate. But until that time, keep in mind that practicing takes effort and effort is not part of natural meditation, but only a way to build the muscle-memory mental habit we need to meditate. So don't confuse the efforts to meditate with meditation. We are practicing meditation, you know: "sounds like this."