



The Myth of Progress, by Les Kaye

If we find ourselves discouraged by lack of spiritual progress, after several weeks, months, even years, we do not need to be concerned that

our practice is somehow not working. Actually, when we become aware that we feel discouraged, we should allow ourselves to be encouraged by the stick-to-it effort we have made up to that moment. Our continuous effort is a reflection of our sincerity and determination. It shows that we have a deep feeling about our lives and that we have maintained our practice without turning away from uncertainty. That continuation itself is the only real measure of progress we need.

We all want to feel encouragement, a marvelous antidote for doubt and anxiety. We don't like to feel that we are wasting our time; we want unambiguous, positive acknowledgement of ourselves and our efforts. So

it is natural that we hope for greater intellectual understanding and deeper intuitive revelations in our spiritual practice, indications of progress satisfy our thinking minds, our thirst for rational certainty.

But if we sense a new understanding or insight in ourselves, we have to be careful not to become proud of what we think we have attained. Our pride will create self-satisfaction, threatening our determination. By starting to emphasize attainment, we become less patient and more susceptible to discouragement. So if we think that we have attained something, it is important for us not to think about it too much or try to hold on to the exciting feeling it gives us. The best thing we can do is just resume our attitude that is ready for anything, including the possibility of discouragement.

Modern society emphasizes progress and achievement in the day-to-day affairs of life.Â But to anticipate progress in spiritual progress is a misunderstanding. It is not necessary to be concerned about a spiritual report card. [â€]

Discouragement results when our minds dwell on past disappointments, expectations that were not met. When we are aware of its source, we can actually use our discouragement to become awake to something we are carrying around in our minds, something that is affecting our attitude toward our work. Practice enables us to change discouragement from something negative to something positive.

--Les Kaye, in "Zen at Work"

