



Abandon Only What Is Not Yours, by Shaila Catherine

The wise understand the importance of letting go -- even letting go of the things we strive for and attain. Meditative training is more about letting go than it is about attaining levels of absorption. Spiritual life invites you to relinquish all that binds you, whether that is your cherished fantasies, destructive attitudes, assumptions, views, or treasured roles, beliefs, and ideals.

“If you don’t want to suffer, don’t cling” could summarize the main thrust of all the Buddha’s instructions. But if you can’t follow that simple instruction completely and need (as so of many of us do) more complex approaches to help you or keep you busy until you finally tire of clinging, an extensive array of meditation tools have been devised by generations of practitioners.

And yet, if at any point you are unsure what to do in this practice, just let go.

It is not necessarily one more task to perform. It is, simply, what occurs when you are not clinging: a direct expression of wisdom arising in a moment of experience. Simple wisdom tells us, “When you are being dragged, let go of the leash.” When you feel the pain of grasping and understand the holding on as the cause of your suffering, the solution becomes obvious.

Some people fear that letting go could diminish the quality of their lives, health, abilities, achievements, or personal property. To this, the Buddha said, “Whatever is not yours, abandon it; when you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness.” This invites a profound reflection on what one can authentically claim as one’s own. As we discern the impermanent, conditioned character of all material and mental processes, we eliminate perceptions, sensory experience, and material things as fields for possession. On the surface it seems like we are asked to give up everything, but simultaneously comes the realization that there is actually nothing possessed and consequently nothing that can actually be given up. The great abandonment is to let go of the concept of ownership.

Letting go in meditation is the relinquishment that involves no loss. Recognizing impermanence leads to the realization of the pure and ungraspable nature of things. Knowing this basic fact of things, one has nothing to fear. And the extraordinary delight that arises with realization surpasses all temporary pleasures, softening any residual fear that may want to grasp again what can never actually be possessed.

