

'Strong Determination' Meditation Sits ~ Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Strong determination sit is an English translation of a Pali expression *aditana*.

00:00:13 That means that you make a determination or an intention that for a certain period of

00:00:21 time you're going to sit without moving voluntarily.

00:00:26 It could be an hour, it could be two hours, three hours, four hours, or longer.

00:00:34 And in general, there is the issue of sitting for long periods of time, whether you make

00:00:40 a vow not to intentionally move or not.

00:00:46 I encourage people, as a general principle, at least occasionally, to do long sits and

00:00:55 or strong determination sits.

00:00:59 I think it's a very good way to push the envelope of practice.

00:01:05 There are some parameters, of course, some basic principles you have to keep in mind.

00:01:12 The first and obvious one, but still needs to be mentioned, is I would never encourage

00:01:19 anybody to sit to the extent that it causes any harm to the body.

00:01:28 Usually for the average person, you would have to sit quite a long time to cause harm

00:01:33 to the body in terms of joints or paresthesia of nerves or that kind of thing.

00:01:43 I mean abiding paresthesia from having damaged nerves.

00:01:49 I don't think that's likely to happen for the average person in just an hour or two

00:01:54 hours of strong determination sit.

00:01:57 But a person does need to be careful that no physical damage arises due to the practice.

00:02:07 And how you do that is basically you start experimenting, and if you do something that

00:02:16 causes you to be limping for a half hour after you get up, well, that's a sign that you

00:02:21 don't want to be doing that kind of thing.

00:02:26 We want to just deal with the sensations, the sensory challenge that's involved in the long sits.

00:02:38 So what's the sensory challenge involved in strong determination sit or long sit?

00:02:44 Well, clearly it brings up physical discomfort, and that physical discomfort then brings up

00:02:53 mental and emotional reactions.

00:02:55 So the mental reactions come through mental images and internal talk.

00:03:01 The emotional reaction comes from the emotional type sensation in the body, which many of

00:03:09 you know I call feel, body sensation that seems to a given individual at a given time

00:03:15 to be emotional in nature.

00:03:17 And then the more physical type sensations, the pain, the fatigue, and so forth, the sleepiness,

00:03:25 possible nausea, those sensations I call touch in contrast to the feel.

00:03:34 So basically the longer you sit, the greater the intensity of sensory challenge that arises.

00:03:43 Mental discomforts become more intense, your feel-image-talk reactions to them become more

00:03:52 intense.

00:03:53 So at some point you have a touch-feel-image-talk storm going on in yourself.

00:04:05 Now to the extent that you can bring concentration, clarity, and equanimity to that, to that extent

00:04:14 it's going to turn into a flavor of empowerment and purification.

00:04:23 On the other hand, by forcing yourself to sit long or sit without moving, it may drive

00:04:31 you into a state of concentration, clarity, and equanimity.

00:04:37 So one use for the longer sits or the strong determination sits is it will force you or

00:04:45 literally drive you into new levels of mindfulness that can be extremely useful because that

00:04:56 then becomes the new set point for your practice.

00:05:00 So sometimes people will tell me, well, I've reached a certain plateau with my practice.

00:05:07 What can I do in order to push the envelope to move on to the next level, and so forth?

00:05:13 Well actually there's a bunch of things a person can do, but one of the simplest things

00:05:17 they can do is start doing at least occasionally, not necessarily every time, but at least occasionally

00:05:26 doing longer sits, strong determination sits, dealing with that challenge pushes you forward.

00:05:33 I said that there's some guidelines.

00:05:35 One of the guidelines is, well, don't damage the body with this.

00:05:41 Another guideline is don't get goal-driven in terms of thinking that the issue is how

00:05:52 much can I take for how long.

00:05:56 That's not the issue in this kind of sitting.

00:05:59 The issue is how much can I learn and retrain the nervous system.

00:06:05 That's sort of your goal.

00:06:06 The goal is not like, okay, I've got to make it to four hours without moving kind of thing.

00:06:12 The goal is, okay, how much mileage retraining of my processing of touch, feel, image, talk

00:06:21 can I get from what I'm doing?

00:06:24 The guidelines are don't damage the body.

00:06:28 And yes, there is a goal, but the goal is not to achieve certain personal records in

00:06:37 terms of duration of sit or intensity of what you sat through.

00:06:42 The goal is, well, how effectively am I learning?

00:06:47 There's something to be gained by bearing down.

00:06:50 There's something to be gained by easing up.

00:06:53 The main advantage to this is, as I say, that it will tend to push the envelope of your

00:07:02 practice in a natural way because the natural response to intense physical discomfort is

00:07:11 actually to drop into equanimity.

00:07:15 But in order to access that natural response, you may have to push the envelope a little

00:07:22 bit.

00:07:23 For certain people, this is actually a very easy way.

00:07:27 Well, no, I won't say a very easy way.

00:07:30 It's a relatively easy way to make a lot of progress, a lot of tangible progress.

00:07:38 So if you find that you're one of those people, I would encourage you to explore this within

00:07:47 the parameters that I mentioned.

00:07:49 Remember that if you've got 10 units of physical discomfort, 10 units of emotional discomfort,

00:07:59 10 units of disconcerting imagery, and 10 units of negative talk, if you can keep that

00:08:05 all separate, you'll have 10 plus 10 plus 10 plus 10, which is 40.

00:08:12 If they get tangled, you're going to get the impression of 10 times 10 times 10 times 10,

00:08:20 which is 10,000.

00:08:22 Put alternatively, a level of perceived suffering that the average person would say is 10,000

00:08:32 and utterly unbearable, it's fainting, it's kill-me-now level for the average person.

00:08:42 For someone with mindfulness skills, it's not 10,000, it's 40, and that's quite doable.

00:08:51 So if you bear that in mind and explore in that direction, then this can be a very meaningful

00:09:00 practice for you.