

Help

I am trying to think what helps me best in my practice. I have access to a zen teacher, and a very well qualified one who is Co-Abott of the San Francisco ZenCenter but he only comes toNorthern Ireland twice a year, so the rest of the time there is only contact by phone. I don't find that as helpful as face to face contact for some reason.

I get lots of help from books; perhaps that is my main source of Dharma teachings. The fact that I studied philosophy for so many years probably makes it easier for me to work my way critically through lots of books, even from diverse branches of Buddhism and other spiritual teachings without getting too confused. Sometimes I listen to Dharma teachings from the web or on CD's or watch videos. I think my problem is maybe *having too much access* to teachings. I have so many spiritual advisors wanting me to read articles and watch video snippets that lately I have had to stop looking at Facebook. I need to be more selective. The Buddha gave a clear warning to a group of people who were also confused by many different teachings, telling them to weigh up any teachings in the light of their own experience, and not to be too subservient to the authority of teachers. He outlined this idea in a famous passage in the Kalama Sutta:

- “Do not go upon what has been **acquired by repeated hearing**,
- nor upon **tradition**,
- nor upon **rumor** ,
- nor upon **what is in a scripture**,
- nor upon **surmise**,
- nor upon an **axiom**,
- nor upon **specious reasoning**,
- nor upon a **bias towards a notion that has been pondered over**,
- nor upon **another's seeming ability**,
- nor upon the consideration, "**The monk is our teacher.**"
- Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.'

I suppose, as the Zen practitioner, that zazen or meditation is very important and I try to sit at least twice per day. Being able to meditate with others is also vital for me and I attend a meditation group in real life. Somehow you seem to gain strength from meditating with and being encouraging to each other.

Finally, being able to talk to others in Second Life and discuss spiritual matters is also a great help to me.