

# Juniper

## Is It Working?

How do we know whether Buddhist training is working? The answer depends on several factors, including what do we mean by “working” and where are we when we start the training?

Let’s compare it to exercise. How do we know that exercise is working? The answer depends on similar factors: what do we mean by working, and where are we when we start. For example, by “working,” do we mean becoming an Olympic athlete, or do we mean improving our resting heart rate and circulation? Also, do we start out moderately fit, or do we start out completely out of shape and overweight? One person may feel fantastic doing a moderate amount of regular exercise and keeping the fat off, whereas another might feel like a failure by taking more than three hours to run a marathon.

What about Buddhist training? By “working,” do we mean living in a continuous aura of bliss or are we satisfied with incremental changes in our well-being? Do we start with high levels of agitation and hardship or are we somewhat content to begin with? If our first encounter with Buddhist training, for example, occurs when we are very agitated or physically ill, just to have a little peace of mind might feel like a great accomplishment.

Buddhist training is working if we feel a positive transformation in experience. If we become more calm, if we can recover more quickly from stress and hardship, if we are more patient and understanding, if we are less rigid and more open, if we feel stronger and more in control, or if we experience changes in our insight and awareness, then it is working.

And Buddhist training keeps on working, sometimes greatly surprising us with how much it can do. We can compare it to how dripping water slowly smooths jagged rock. The incremental changes may be so tiny we cannot even see them, but one day we will look at the rock and find that it has undergone a remarkable transformation, and is now beautifully smooth.

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