

Making Meditation a Daily Rendezvous—Observing the Little Moments

Meditation can be easy and natural. A starting understanding of meditation is a relaxed state of mind in a continuity of observation. It need not be a “practice” or “discipline.” Meditation can be integrated in our daily lives in natural ways. These natural ways later may grow into deeper attainments of sitting meditation. But elementary meditation, bringing peace and insight, is really well within anybody’s daily schedule and willingness to quietly observe. It doesn’t require ceremonies or special sitting postures or breathing techniques. It is called “observing meditation.” I practice it every day, many times a day—a string of little moments that have great consequence for body, mind and spirit. Observing meditation is now a very natural state of mind for me. And is a foundation for my more structured “pure awareness” meditation or philosophical meditations.

Our daily lives today are filled with an enormous range of responsibilities, opportunities and diversions. When the alarm buzzer goes off, after a possibly restless night of anxiousness, strange subconscious dreams, the acid discomfort of heartburn from a too-rich meal, we are already thinking out our day. Our body (and its anxiety levels) is already responding to the neural-chemicals kicked up by the brain as we come into waking consciousness and launch into the daily agenda: what do I have to do, where do I have to be, how will I handle a difficult situation at work, one child needs attention I don’t have time to give, one teen is hoping I don’t talk to her, can I afford a new renovation of the kitchen, I need to study for the nonprofit work I’m doing or I need to trim that work back, how is my diet doing (can I have some butter on my toast, or eat it dry), can I do brisk walking today or am I going to have to skip that, how is the car running, what’s the weather like, why am I not sleeping well?

Within a few minutes of coming out of the psychological (should be spiritual—another series of articles) fogs and mists of dream country generally people are flooded with thoughts of their upcoming day. Mental notes are being logged, prioritized, or we are just thinking in a kind of swirl of waking consciousness.

Studies have shown that we are creating thoughts in the range of 30-50 a minute. From the moment we wake to the time of actually falling asleep, our thoughts have added into the tens of thousands: over 57,000 thoughts. Each day. Most of these are in the nature of anxieties, worries, private criticisms and observations of self and others, and generally passive thoughts rising out of the wash of our contemporary mediums of TV, radio, computers, handhelds. Occasionally we reach a train of thought, a series of thoughts—like train cars—that run logically along the tracks of a single subject. Or a pattern of thoughts organize into a tapestry of insight or cognition. But, for the most part we live a daily life caught in a continual perfect storm of thinking too much of things too inconsequential—and our bodies do begin to reflect that.

And this is why many people who are attracted to the concept of meditation and start some method of meditation, eventually let it fall to the wayside. The overwhelming press of life, and the continual foaming of thoughts—mainly in conditions of anxiety or passive entertainment—literally overwhelm the budding processes of personal meditation. The comment I most often hear in discussing meditation is: “I used to do it. I love the idea. I wish I could do it. But I am just not following the practice. I don’t know why.”

Well, they often do know why, but it is hard to face in themselves as they genuinely like/love the con-

cepts and results of meditation. But, their day—the breakdown into the moments and minutes of their day—has really not been looked at as a continual flow of observation: sensual, mental and psychic. Rather, their day is a continual flow of reactionary or static thinking that is shaped by the rapid pace and press of life, and consumerism, that most of us think of as bringing fulfillment. An ego that is daily sculpted by this kind of thinking and desire force, will gradually resist meditation (and I have heard all kinds of reasons and justifications) and, with regrets, stop.

Beginners in meditation, or more advanced practitioners desiring to return to meditation, are benefited greatly by understanding meditation not as a practice that is adopted as if it is different from our natural selves, but as a practice that rises out of our natural and normal states of observation.

Observation is the foundation of meditation, the easy and achievable starting point toward a complete experience of the beginning levels to more advanced levels of meditation. Meditation itself—a starting understanding is a relaxed state of mind that has a continuity of observation—is a natural condition of our mind, both in its human and intuitive/universal expressions.

So, meditation can be distilled down to an observing openness that continues for a few seconds, or for a few minutes or up to hours. Being enthralled in a good book is a state of meditation as you are concentrating enough to read the book, yet are also observing the story of the book over a length of time. I often compare the process of reading to beginning meditation. I read every day—both for study and betterment and for entertainment, and discovered long ago the conditions of engaged reading reflect the early states of meditation.

That is why when reading an engaging book, where our consciousness is naturally in an elementary state of meditation, time slows or even stops, and we are almost totally unaware of our body. In fact, we are much more in a mental state than a body state.

The practice of “observing meditation” can be applied to any simple interlude that allows you to really settle into the observing process, and bring some sense of sensual, bodily or mental enjoyment to you. Upon waking up—turning off the alarm, and being flooded by thoughts of plans and worry—stop and feel the smooth, cottony warmth of the sheets and blankets wrapping around your body. Allow your mind to relax into feeling the comforting fabric, its texture and temperature, folds and hollows. This is a state of relaxed mindfulness, rather than fixed concentration. Concentration really comes out of relaxation (which is why most scientific breakthroughs don’t come out of conscious logical thinking but from dreams or daydreams or relaxed times when the subconscious and intuition can break through the crusty surface of our normal rational consciousness).

If this observing meditation continues for 30 seconds of a minute—relaxing your mind into the feel of the blankets or how your body is responding to the waking process—then you have naturally gone into a state of beginning meditation.

This observing meditation may be very brief, but that is wonderful. The idea is to allow the underlying meditative qualities of the mind to naturally emerge while you are enjoying a sensual or mental interlude that brings comfort and peace to you.

Another observing meditation: feeling the hot spray of the shower on your face, neck and back and just relaxing into the heat and pressurized streams of the water on all the different muscles and nerve tracks of the upper part of the. Try to feel as deeply as you can the sensations of the water, the heat, the spray, the skin, muscles. Let your mind relax into the experience rather than trying to concentrate on the expe-

rience. In doing this you will discover that the normal thinking mechanism of the mind is diminishing—in a real sense your consciousness is shifting from thinking to perceiving, a deeper state. Combining perceiving and thinking is the most creative and constructive type of thought. But in “observing meditation” the intent is to observe as wholly as possible a sensual experience. Thoughts will diminish in frequency, and my simply cease to arise. It is fine to think thoughts about the observing meditation: about the hot water and muscles. That cultivates your natural awakening into this meditation.

The daily ritual of brewing coffee is a wonderful observing meditation. I do this every day, and it is a combination of simple life/spirit-affirming ceremony and observing meditation.

Observing meditation can be applied to any interlude, or to a daily routine or process, that brings you comfort or a sense of relaxation. Walking along paths or sidewalks, or even down hallways that may seem familiar. Exercising, or spending time in a garden or near a garden. Drinking water. Preparing meals, or sharing meals. Doing house chores. (see my house chores article). Watching TV. Reading a good article or book. This makes it easy.

It also makes it easy to have a meditation each day, a time of a few minutes that can really be extraordinarily peaceful and insightful.

Part 2 to be published later.