

Meditation and Presence

The simplest form of meditation requires two things: a body that is still and relaxed, and an object to focus attention on. Many traditional postures for meditation exist. I have found the greatest ease and stability sitting in a chair, with the spine erect and the palms of the hands resting on the knees. The focus of attention that I have found most useful for beginners is the awareness of the breathing combined with a mental focus: “I” as the feeling in the heart with each inhalation and “am” as the sensation of the whole physical presence on the exhalation. As attention is held in this process, the breathing becomes calmer and the internal dialogue begins to settle down. From this position of quiet alertness it becomes possible to view the stream of consciousness. The awareness that in normal living is focused outward gets accustomed to an inward focus. This focus, however, is less on the content than on the process of the mind’s activity. Awareness has begun to separate from its identification with the content of both outward and inward experience.

In much of our ordinary life we are busy interpreting experience and constructing meaning. Our perceptions are also biased by expectation, opinion, desire, and many other factors. During meditation we use more energy to sustain the process of seeing and very little for interpretation and constructing meanings. The net effect of this kind of meditation practice is that we reduce our reactivity and increase our ability to sustain pure awareness.

At a higher stage of meditation the focus of awareness becomes more subtle. Instead of focusing on a breath, a sound, or an idea, consciousness attends to *Being* itself. Instead of change, consciousness focuses on that which is changeless, the underlying “Isness.” This substratum of consciousness becomes more and more familiar. Instead of the contents of the mirror, we are aware of the mirror of itself.

Everyday life is seen more and more as a reflection of the mirror-as both real and unreal against the backdrop of this underlying changeless reality. Meditation at this level is experienced as much by a letting go as by a firm concentration. As the object of consciousness becomes more subtle, so does the effort of consciousness.

Consciousness attends to whatever arises. Meditation is more and more carried into the gross psychological events of ordinary life. At this stage some of our compulsions have been recognized and can fall away. The compulsive habits of thought-many of them based on fear, desire, neediness, and self-centeredness-begin to lose their power. The identity that was rooted in these compulsions begins to melt in a new quality of emergence, one based in simple nonreactive awareness. A different, less egotistical self begins to be felt.

Freed of our habitual thoughts, expectations, opinions, constructions, and fears, consciousness is freed to receive deeper impressions. New meanings begin to flow into consciousness from the unconscious. Extra sensory experience may be heightened. Whether we are aware of it or not, we become more sensitive to others’ thoughts and emotions. We may be able to respond to others more sensitively and wisely, because we are less

dominated by our old habitual patterns of thought and feeling. At this stage we are flooded with rich meanings, and life can take on a new depth.

There really is no end to the refinement that is possible. One more and more begins to perceive qualitatively. The ultimate reality which we are preparing to apprehend and which is all that is, has certain qualities such as peace, compassion, creativity, vitality, generosity, glory, subtlety, wisdom, beauty, and unity.

Through this deeper refinement of attention an ever more subtle focusing, the false identity collapses. The supports on which it once depended have been removed, and the self begins to feel like a unique point of view of the Whole, a reflector of cosmic awareness.

When we can listen to and express that Self we will find a what is needed to meet life's demands. Having brought the conscious mind into resonance with a dimensionless point within, which contains all qualities in potential, each of us comes spontaneously to the Truth. We will be able to embrace life and those we need to love. This dimensionless point within is our point of contact with the qualities of Spirit. If we can regularly silence the mind and be aware at this core of our being, we will receive help from the Source of Life. Presence is the empty center that attracts and manifest the quality of the Spirit.

Questions for Reflection:

- What, if any, method do you use for noticing your breath in meditation?
- What, if any, object of focused attention do you use in meditation?
- How, if at all, have your methods of meditation shifted and changed over the course of your practice?