

THOUGHTS ON AN INTRODUCTION TO YOURSELF

A MEDITATION E-BOOK

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BY

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Meditation in the presence of the Buddha

Meditation is a very personal thing, and nothing is more mysterious than the effects said to come from it. As with things like this, there is a mystique about some places or objects that are considered sacred. These kind of things can be difficult to fathom. The weekend of September 24-26th, 2010 was a time to consider sacred objects, the mysterious, related to meditation here in Indianapolis.

On the east side of town is a recently erected beautiful little Vietnamese Buddhist temple, Chua An Lac, surrounded by an average working class neighborhood, down the street from a very large and popular church. In the confines of this relatively unknown little temple lay some extraordinary relics for all who would come to see, relics of the [Buddha](#). In protective glass cases were hand painted pictures behind the relics of some of the Buddha's immediate disciples and other Buddhist notables. Among them were the Buddha's leading disciples, [Ananda](#), [Sariputra](#) , and the famed yogi of Tibet, [Milarepa](#).

Visitors sat around the carpeted temple floor on black cushions meditating and as still as the fabled Mount Meru. Others knelt before the relics with their foreheads resting on red, ornately brocaded cloths, to receive the blessing of the relics. There was quiet weeping in some spots. All attendees spoken to conveyed that there was something profound about their experience in the presence of the Buddha. Could the meditative stillness in the temple have been because of the Buddha's presence, if only in the form of beautiful crystalline balls said to have come from his funeral pyre over 2500 years

ago? The presence of relics or the sentiment that all living beings be joyous and live in safety; what really happens while meditating in the presence of the Buddha?

Meditation is more than you think

Meditation is more than you think, literally. Science has studied it, mystics and yogis practice it, and no one can really explain it satisfactorily to the common person.

Meditation has gone through its new wave conceptions but its mystery is beyond words, beyond thinking. It begs the question, what is thinking?

Meditation is purported to introduce us to ourselves, and understanding thinking would be a big part of that. Meditation masters of all stripes, yogis, Buddhist and others tell ask us to bring the mind under control and see the beauty of our true nature. Controlling thinking, controlling the mind, is controlling the brain. How can the mind control thinking? Are the mind and the brain the same thing? These are perplexing questions for the average person.

Meditation masters, of no greater renown than the Buddha himself, say that the mind is thoughts. The mind is not the brain. This relationship is the great mystery that meditators go about solving. One yogi, [Swami Rama](#), made this grand statement about the relationship between the mind and the brain/body: All of the body is in the mind, but all the mind is not in the body.

If what he said is true then the work at controlling the mind (thinking, the brain), involves a bit more understanding than just sitting quietly for a few minutes in a yoga class and chanting OM. Neither is meditation simply some philosophy that is nice to consider while sipping a latte at Starbucks. One famous meditation master, [Osho](#), when asked

about philosophy explained that he was not a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, a lover of knowledge. Philosophy was very conducive to discussions around the coffee table.

Philosia was different; it was the love of seeing, of being, the direct experience of the silence beyond thinking. That is the goal of meditation; it is more than you think.

Meditation and critical thinking

October 11, 2010

Does meditation, often thought of as some mystical, otherworldly practice, have any useful purpose in the everyday world? Is it opposed to critical thinking? The background for the practice taken from some popular sources may lead one think that way but, upon closer examination, the true meditative tradition informs us otherwise.

Media personalities influence people, and many people conform to the standard set by these people. The goal of media personalities may be to obtain a following, to influence opinion, or to sell a product, and without critical analysis, we might just put ourselves at a disadvantage. Several infamous characters have marveled, and prospered, at the masses unquestioned tendency for this type of conformity. Hitler's words, "It is good for leaders that people don't think," could be any media mogul's byline these days.

Meditation requires critical thinking, and strengthens it. For example, there are texts in the meditative tradition that hint that, as normal citizens, we are hypnotized, walking around entranced, conditioned by our surroundings. One who thinks critically might recognize this fact. The current pundits who advocate **critical thinking**, a buzz-phrase now in business and academia, would say that this state of affairs leads us to take in what we hear and see without any critical analysis.

The **Yoga Sutras**, a famous text on meditation suggests that ignoring the reality, the underlying basis of things, ultimately leads us to fear. Fear is one thing that is rife in the media these days. So much so that Steven Colbert of the Colbert Report is holding a satirical rally he has named The March to Keep Fear Alive.

The Yoga Sutras and other meditation texts offer up that the practice can help you understand yourself. What if we really understood our own mind? Such training might just help us see beyond the media's façade to what is really happening in our world. We might be surprised at the resources that meditation provides. Meditation and the critical thinking involved with its study and practice could well be a key to thinking more critically about the world, and that just might make the world a better place.

Meditation and mysticism

October 24, 2010

[Meditation](#) is a mystical endeavor with practical implications, and this is something made evident in Rabbi Alan Lurie's Huffington Post article [The mystical experience: a question of what's beyond](#) on October 24th. The Rabbi list four essential questions that he thinks naturally arise when exploring the subject of mysticism. I might add a few other things but his list was intriguing: 1) How can one access this deeper reality? 2) What does this have to do with religion? 3) Is this "deeper reality" real, or just a biochemical reaction or delusional state? and 4) Why should one care about accessing this deeper reality?

The Rabbi's take on religion and mysticism was refreshing, and he conceded that religion is not the only atmosphere that nourishes the mystical longing. Meditation, he notes, is the mystic's means of attempting to understand the ultimate reality – God (in his words) or whatever term you'd like to use to name the ultimate reality. I pose the last statement this way because, as you might note, the meditation section of this Religion/Spirituality Examiner is listed under the head, Secular. Curious, but secular, religious, or spiritual, there is no name for the ultimate that all agree on. This the Rabbi leaves to George Eliot's odd terminology, "the other side of silence".

Whether this mystical state is the outcome of biochemical reactions or the biochemical reactions are the result seem irrelevant to the Rabbi's explanation of mysticism. He notes, as do many others, the consistency of the mystic's explanation of their experience around the world. Lastly, the Rabbi, a man after my own heart here,

explains why we should care about accessing the deeper reality that mysticism claims to reveal. He used the example of Plato's Allegory of the cave. If you've never read it then you should. It is all about critical thinking on the one hand and mystic revelation on the other. See a lovely [visual depiction of Plato's cave](#) to help you understand the story.

What are your thoughts on meditation, mysticism, and religion?

The mystery of meditation

October 27, 2010

Meditation is still a misunderstood subject in this country. Still often considered an Eastern practice associated with the non-theistic Buddhist tradition, or with Hinduism, meditation is a universal practice. People overlook how significant the contemplative life, the mystic life, is in western religious tradition. The misconception about meditation, about **mysticism** has similarities to the conflict in all the monolithic religions between the more external or exoteric practices, and the internal or **esoteric practices** (supported by meditation).

Ninian Smart, in his *Worldviews*, delineated six elements that composed religion 1) the experiential — an inexplicable, transcendent reality, 2) myth, 3) ritual, 4) social, 5) dogma, 6) and ethics. The experiential is that component that transcends what the mind can fathom. Every religion has that element that is difficult to discuss, and all those who have experienced this aspect of religion have only one response, silence.

Meditation is an act that addresses this universal longing for the bliss of this silence. A definition of meditation is the one pointed flow of the mind striving for an experience beyond its precincts towards a union with the experiential. This might sound like religion but everyone can and does aspire to this, church or un-church, agnostic or atheist. The urge for a transcendent joy, peace, and happiness, the hallmarks of the experiential per the mystics, is a universal urge.



Photo: C Crenshaw

Questioning meditation

January 9, 2011

Recently a blog post by a noted [Baptist theologian](#) gave us some insight into the U.S. take on the practice of [meditation](#). The blogger directed his attention to hatha yoga, and a review of *The subtle body: the story of yoga in America*, not particularly noting that, in its western pop culture incarnation, 'yoga' is virtually divorced from meditation. The blog spurred responses such as the one by a IUPUI scholar, [Andrea Jain](#)'s article in the online magazine Religion Dispatch.

The professor noted, by way of reference to other articles sympathetic to our bloggers post, that there are those who assert that meditation is something that is dangerous or even demonic. The blogger makes us ask the question, Is any objective investigation of meditation ever undertaken by those who propose that meditation is evil? Granted no one who is not drawn to meditation will want to consider it.

While in India, I had the privilege of visiting a Syrian Coptic church. There I met a most fascinating nun, a product of India, who spoke to me about meditation. She had spent time off and on in a world-renowned ashram in Rishikesh studying and practicing meditation while yet a nun.

When I asked her why she had studied meditation with Indian swamis she said that Christianity as she knew it had lost its way when it came to the art of meditation. Meditation for her was not just study and thought over a passage of scripture as our blogger makes it a point to emphasize. Rather, her incentive for meditating, enhanced and strengthened by instruction from her meditation teachers, involved the direct experience of an often unconsidered passage of scripture our blogger knows well – Be still and know that I am God.

I know that little nun, filled with India's indigenous propensity for meditation, would have a few things to say to those westerners, such as our blogger, who wage these rhetorical objections to meditation without proper understanding.

Origins of meditation

October 5, 2011

Where did [meditation](#) come from? When did humans first feel this urge to merge with something wholly other? These questions are sometimes asked when people are considering why meditate at all. An atheist might consider meditation something that is useless because it is trying to connect to some imaginary god, although a scientific, behavioral psychology, approach to meditation might appeal to them.

A religious person might consider any extra effort meditation required attempting to connect to an all too real god as unnecessary. Although reading the mystic's experience, an ordinary religious person might find meditation intriguing. Curious notions both, some might say, but when did humans start considering such questions?

Leaving aside, for the moment, what religious texts say about the origins of civilization, worship, and meditation, if we look at the recent archaeological findings at [Gobekli Tepe](#) in Turkey, we find something interesting. There an archaeologist, [Klaus Schmidt](#), argues that hunter-gatherers met long ago to build complex religious communities, a spectacular temple complex at Gobekli Tepe in this case. Before what we know as civilized life, these hunter-gathers built an awesome center to conduct ceremonies related to what we know as religion. Schmidt's thought is that culture is a product of religion. To restate what he theorizes, culture, as we know it, is an element of the human experience that succeeded the contemplation of a mystery both tremendous and fascinating, as [Rudolph Otto](#) explains his idea of the holy.

It could very well be that meditation, the urge to merge with the wholly other, to connect with the mystery, just like religion itself, is an unseen part of our human makeup, a genetic inheritance as Schmidt puts it.

This information might spur some to look around Indianapolis, or wherever, for some good meditation instruction. No matter what your theological persuasion – theist, agnostic, or atheist, tap into your genetic inheritance; connect with the quest of the ancestors - meditate.

Meditation and quantum physics

February 13, 2011

Recently I read with great relish the book [*God is not dead*](#) by Amit Goswami Ph.D. For those of you who saw the movie *What the #\$%! do we know*, you may recognize the name. He was a quantum physicist featured in the film. In his book he discusses some things about quantum physics that are fascinating in how they relate to [meditation](#). Many of the things that quantum physicists, like Goswami, talk about are concepts similar to things mentioned in sacred texts. This may not be any great revelation to those learned in the scriptures, but it is fascinating for the novice meditators. Goswami's premise is that science and religion are not at odds. There is scientific proof that God, Consciousness, quantum consciousness, or God-consciousness is a reality.

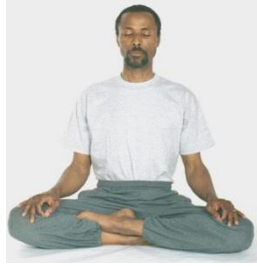
Goswami mentions various attributes of religious thinking in his book, and some would say that meditation has nothing to do with religion, and that would be true. However, meditation leads by means of intuition to some of the same conclusions that quantum physics has come to. Taking for granted that all religious scriptures are inspired, intuition having created the texts, Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, "All beings abide in Me; but I do not abide in them." This is a real mind bender for people.

Goswami takes on this mind bender by way of explaining his quantum physics concepts and philosophical terms like monistic idealism. Monistic idealism says that everything is in God, but God is not in everything, clearly the same statement as Krishna's, and something to which quantum physics would ascribe. As Goswami puts it, it is a

statement of both the immanence and transcendence of the divine. He clearly notes that it is because quantum physics brings to the table ideas like tangled-hierarchies and non-locality, that monistic idealism makes any sense to his fellow scientists, let alone lay people.

Science has come to conclusions about 'quantum' consciousness, but what science inspired the scriptures scribes, the mystics, the seers? The mystics admit that there is an internal science, the science of yoga, a meditative science. Goswami admits that he and others like the quantum physicist, David Bohm, have had encounters with mystics. Did the mystics influence the findings of these scientists, or would these mystical scientists have come to their conclusions about things like quantum consciousness independently?

Goswami's quantum physics sees the ground of all being as consciousness. These are the words of theoretical quantum physics and the words of the mystics. The mystics came about their intuitive understanding of reality by practicing meditation, and achieving the 'quantum' goals mentioned by the mystics before them. Meditation is a practice used to directly experience, what Goswami calls, quantum consciousness - the direct knowledge of reality, of Oneness, of what is true, beyond the boundaries of thought and sense perception. This ultimate experience given different names by the religion and science, per the mystics, has the same experiential effect for the practitioner – a peace that surpasses all human understanding.



Is meditation relaxation?

March 4, 2011

Herbert Benson is famous for his understanding of what he termed the relaxation response in his now classic book by that name. His book [The relaxation revolution](#) is his new contribution to the discussion on the benefits of relaxation.

In an earlier work, the *Relaxation response*, Benson notes, related to his investigation of TM, that when one uses any monosyllabic sound repetitively it aids in producing the relaxation response. This might present to some the idea that the monosyllabic sound (one, one, one, or cat, cat, cat) or a mantra itself produced the response. Might it also cause some to confuse the relaxation response with meditation? Upon further investigation it is clear that the body relaxes and the breath slows down during the relaxation response. With practice, just an awareness of the breath and a simple physical relaxation technique, leaving aside any sound, can and does produce the relaxation response.

This brings us back to our original question, does relaxation equate to meditation. The relaxation response aids in achieving a meditative state, but it differs, and the difference is subtle. This subtlety, related to the fact that relaxation, REM or dreaming sleep, and the meditative state share a level of brainwave activity, [Theta](#), is not often considered.

The dreaming sleep state is preceded by a state of physical relaxation. The precursor to most suggestion work, hypnosis, is a state of relaxation. The precursor to meditation is also a state of relaxation, the difference being that meditation allows us a conscious self-willed means to move beyond the confines of the mind and the body. Dreaming and hypnotic suggestion do not have this as a goal, at least not the average understanding of these things. Meditation is a tool for going beyond the confines of the mind whether in dream or relaxation to discover, remove the cover from, what the quantum physicists call - quantum consciousness.



Photo of Anandamayi Ma

Meditation and the feminine

March 9, 2011

In celebration of the International Day of Women we might consider if there is anything about it that relates to [meditation](#). The truth of the matter is that without the feminine the practice of meditation would not make much sense. Meditation demands contact with subtle aspects of the human makeup, aspects often considered feminine. For example, most of what we know about the world has come about from our exploration of the things external to our bodies; sometimes associated with scientific materialism. These methods denigrate the passive, the nurturing, and the receptive.

There have been divisions like this in religion for example that have bifurcated theologies into the dogmatic and the mystical. The mystical has often been associated with the feminine, and down played by the patriarchy, and our western culture. Looking around Indianapolis, and elsewhere in the world, it is obvious that the majority of people practicing religions are women; even women populate almost all yoga classes.

The meditators as mystics have a deep understanding regarding the need for integrating the feminine and masculine, integrating them in an aspiration to make the human divine. From Carl Jung's explanation of anima(feminine unconscious) and

animus, to the Vedic depictions of deity like Shiva and Shakti (divine feminine), mystics everywhere are striving for a direct experience of the feminine. In yoga for example there is striving for the union of the masculine and the feminine, and then the transcending of them both.

In days gone by the names of the divine feminine have been **Isis, Astarte, Diana, Demeter, Hecate, Kali, and Inanna.**)These names are not ancient memories, and it is certain that somewhere amongst women, and men, on this recent anniversary of an international day dedicated to women, that someone is sitting in meditation speaking or thinking the name of the divine feminine with reverence.

Promise of energy psychology and meditation

May 14, 2011

Energy psychology, a term coined only recently, has its roots in the past. Based on the ancient knowledge of the acupuncture meridians, and reflecting the knowledge of the marma points from the Indian system Ayurveda (some might question the latter); a clinical psychologist named Callahan stumbled upon energy psychology. After working unsuccessfully with a client using talk therapy, he had her tap on what was the end of one of the acupuncture meridians. The patient got relief instantly from something she had been in decade long therapy to resolve.

This stumble has now developed into several different systems of working with the energy body, maybe the most well known being Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). The basic premise of EFT is simple: the cause of all negative emotions is a disruption in the body's energy system. Energy system, sounds like something that would relate to [meditation](#), but not to the modern world of scientific psychology. The fact is that EFT has worked on an extraordinary range of disorders by addressing the emotional root of the problem while tapping through a series of acupuncture points on the body. This does not require a long term experience with a therapist. There are practitioners who provide peer-to-peer coaching all over the world. There are even a few [in Indy](#). Everything from pain relief to freedom from the fear of leaving the house (agoraphobia) has been addressed by EFT.

Scientific psychology is scrutinizing EFT, and it should, but meditation experts intuitively understand its connection with the energy body, and recognize EFT's benefits. A great

portion of the practice of meditation is objectively observing the train of thought, thought or thinking being the nature of the mind. That train of thought has emotionally laden negative and positive content, and neutral content. Meditation is ultimately something that allows access to an aspect of us that is beyond the mind. Scientific psychology might question this, but meditation masters, mystics, the world over have sought to verify such claims and have succeeded they say. A common meditation practice attributed to the Buddhist is related to equanimity, and aids the meditator in being detached from all the thoughts in the mind. One is directed to view all thoughts while maintaining a serene breath. This is the gist of what psychologists might term systematic desensitization. Learning detachment from the mind's content reveals the realm of pure consciousness, per the sacred texts of the yogis.

So what is the promise of energy psychology, by way of EFT, for meditation? EFT has proven itself as something that helps people achieve freedom from the deleterious effects of the negative emotions they hold in their energy body. Freedom from negative emotions can allow for easier progress on the path of meditation. In their book *Chariots of sadhana: yoga of the inner teacher*, physician and psychologist, Martin & Marian Jerry state that the result of EFT is “a rapid release of the disturbing emotions and the development of lasting dispassion to the underlying traumatic events.” They go on to say, “Energy psychology can be thought of as a modern...technology of detachment...a modern application of *prana vidya*, the science of *prana*” (*prana* being the yogis correlate to the Chinese *chi*)

What is the promise of energy psychology for mediators? It may very well be a substantive tool to expedite the evolution of consciousness.

Meditation and Humanism

June 17, 2011

As a day dedicated to [Humanism](#) comes and goes, it gives us pause to consider what a humanist might say about [meditation](#). Humanists, by definition, are concerned with human values and especially reject supernaturalism. They stress individual dignity and worth, and recognize that we all have the capacity, given the chance, for self-realization, as Abraham Maslow would put it. Maslow wrote a very interesting book in the 60s touching on things related to self-realization: [Religions, values, and peak-experiences](#).

Self-realization is not an alien idea to those who meditate, even though mystics might be more inclined toward supernaturalism than a humanist might like. Although, given Humanism's tenets, and when we look at them through the eyes of someone like Abraham Maslow we see that meditators and humanists might have much in common.

Meditation texts from all traditions are all reminiscent of one another when it comes to ideas about the mind, the intellect. An early spiritual master of the Orthodox Church, [Evagrius](#), said *blessed is the intellect that is free of forms, sensations and materiality during prayer - meditation (mine)*. One eastern mystic, [Swami Rama](#), regarding the intellect and its transformation through meditation, says that it is an event *beyond all explanation – and is subject only to that incredible experience that has no tongue*.

To some humanists, and to the staunch materialists, this may all seem like so much mumbo-jumbo. However, what happens when a scientist makes observations about people, ordinary people, which sound a lot like the words of mystics? What then?

Maslow, one of the most well-known humanistic psychologists, makes pronouncements about peak experiences that would make any serious meditator sit up and take notice.

These are some of the responses he got from people who had peak experiences. The universe is perceived as a unified whole. The experience is ego transcending, and is felt to be uniquely valuable – so great that attempts to justify it take away from its dignity and worth. The consciousness of time and space is lost during the experience. The world is accepted afterwards. The experience brings with it emotions such as awe, wonder, surrender, humility, and reverence, and the conflicts of life tend to be resolved.

Again, much of this reads like the account from a major mystics diary, a true seeker yearning for divine union, unitary consciousness, Christ-consciousness, or the Buddha-nature, in the words of various traditions. Maslow wrote, speaking about those whose peak experience had led them to a unitive consciousness, the people reported it was a *sense of the sacred glimpsed in and through the particular instance of the momentary, the secular, the worldly.*

It is fascinating to consider that these similarities in ideas, in concepts, in experience, exist in both humanist and experienced meditator alike. What it says is that all of us, every human being is just an ordinary mystic, if we are paying attention. Look around, find yourself a meditation class, there are a few places in Indy, and find out how to become an ordinary mystic.