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Growing Still

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GROWING STILL¹

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*The winter storm
Hid itself in the bamboos
And grew still.*

--Bashō

My introductory course in transpersonal psychology for undergraduates also includes an introduction to meditation--the art of growing still. I use Gerald May's eclectic guide to the major forms of meditation, The Open Way: A Meditation Handbook (1977). The students are given weekly assignments through which they practice the major forms of meditation presented in the book. This report is a distillation of my observations and reflections over a thirteen-year period (the course is taught twice a year) about the predominant meditation experiences of students in the course. The characteristic outcomes of meditation to be outlined certainly do not all occur in any one individual nor in only one sequence.² But the results do bear testimony to the potential for psychological understanding and transformation--even for beginners and in an academic context--when the mind grows still. Beginning meditators can experience, at least momentarily, alternative ways of perception, understanding, and being. Such preliminary insights can greatly motivate practice towards apprehending more deeply the essential stillness of the mind.

STILLNESS

Learning Stillness

Slowing down the incessant activity of the mind is a necessary beginning. Some measure of quiet is essential groundwork for awareness and insight to take root.

Busyness

When stillness is first heard, the contrast with mental chatter or busyness may seem overwhelming. It becomes evident that the general busyness of life obscures awareness.

Awareness

Mental quietude nurtures increased awareness within and beyond formal meditation. Wonder and appreciation expand.

Reawakening

Meditation is experiencing the present more fully. Every moment affords a new opportunity for reawakening consciousness.

Concentration

A quieter mind entertains fewer distractions. Concentration and focus are enhanced.

REVELATIONS

Relaxation

Meditation may initially be experienced as deep relaxation, perhaps the first such experience in adulthood. It is encouraging to realize that at any moment it is possible to release tensions and breathe more freely.

Beingness

A moment of silence manifests itself: Although brief, it is a compelling vision of an alternative way of being--being beingness.

Will

Systematic meditation demands resolve and discipline. The mental training empowers the will.

Conditioning

A dimension beyond conventional conditioning can be discerned. Past bonds can be severed. Conditioning can not only be modified, but transcended.

Time

Differences between chronological and psychological time become manifest. Timelessness may be experienced.

BEFRIENDING MIND

Befriending Mind

The mind can be befriended--a vast inner territory invites exploration.

Centeredness

With practice in meditation, a still-point becomes recognizable within the mind.

Here—even amidst distraction and turmoil—equanimity resides.

Refuge

Centeredness is a home, a refuge: It is a place to regain balance, sanity, hope.

MIND AND REALITY

Process

When the mind slows down, the dance of life can be viewed.

Reality

Stillness reveals how the mind creates reality. Any one representation of reality becomes less fixed.

Tolerance

Grasping the constructive nature of reality increases tolerance. Past attitudes intrude less, dictate less.

Transformation

The transformative power of the mind--the creator of realities--becomes evident.

WATCHING

Witnessing

Stillness promotes reflection. Thought and action are more open to conscious observation. They begin to proceed less mechanically.

Situations

Situations can be examined slowly--more free of drama, reification, and personal attachment. In watching the incessant rise and fall of events with a quiet mind their inherent transiency becomes evident.

Patterns

From the still-point, the automaticity of response patterns can be observed. Watching the patterns again and again with centered awareness weakens their hold.

Emotion

The ebb and flow of emotions can be experienced more dispassionately. The grip of emotional phenomena loosens when their underlying transiency is understood.

OPENINGS

Receptivity

A quiet, receptive mind is open to many possibilities. Preconception, narrowness, and exclusiveness recede.

Surrender

Stillness is a form of surrender; giving up control; embracing the moment.

Non-Attachment

Surrender also lessens attachments to self-centered needs and prescribed ways of living, resulting in greater freedom.

Expectations

Stillness subdues expectations. Different or unexpected outcomes can be invited, accommodated, welcomed.

Happiness

Preconceptions about forms of happiness limit its realization. Happiness can become the experience of existence unfolding each moment.

EXTENSIONS

Informal Meditation

Formal meditation extends beyond itself: It nourishes a meditative state in daily activities.

Balance and Effortlessness

Beginning meditators learn to achieve a delicate balance point: too little effort produces a lethargic state of consciousness; too much effort, an overly tense state of mind and body. Acquiring meditative balance and effortlessness nurtures wisdom in the art of living.

Creativity

A relaxed mind stimulates and expands creativity. Obsessive and compulsive thinking decrease; intuition and spontaneity increase.

Spirituality

Meditation evokes spirituality: nurtures it; deepens it; illuminates it.

Physical Well-Being

Body and mind are symbiotic. Beginning meditators become more aware of the interrelatedness and often pursue greater physical well-being.

Energy

An inner, quiet energy--beyond more emotional and dramatic expressions of energy--reveals itself.

Bibliography

- May, G. G. (1977). The open way: A meditation handbook. New York: Paulist Press.
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Footnotes

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² The characteristics outlined may be somewhat colored by the course materials, but in general they accord with other accounts of meditational practice. Problems with meditation have been infrequent (see Shapiro, 1985).

