



## WHY CONTINUE?

By Neil W. McKinlay



Many of us are used to getting what we want quickly. We pay for a burger, order a book, and expect our desires to be met now. This is as true for spiritual practice as any other aspect of our lives. When we go to a workshop, an expectation forms: 'After this, everything will change *right away*.' But the path does not unfold in this fashion. In fact, taking an introductory class begins a lifelong journey.

Imagine this: We have been traveling a highway all our lives. Cars - including our own - move along this route at breakneck speed. They whiz by so fast, the surroundings - the trees, the greenery, the other people - are reduced to a blur. When we start to meditate, we begin slowing down. We pull over to the shoulder, open the door, and let our feet touch the earth. Standing up, we feel the sun on our face, the breeze on our skin. The sensations are so immediate. Our experience is so alive, so close. It is as if we have entered another world.

In many ways, we have entered another world: the world of our truest selves. Exploring this is the central task of our lives, and, understandably, such exploration takes time. It is not possible to simply attend a workshop and be done with it. Rather, a long and recurring process has begun. This sees us move through three stages of engagement again and again. These stages are: learning, familiarizing, and seeing.

We must first learn the how tos of meditation. How do I work with the body? How do I attend to the breath? Where do I place my hands? Having received such instruction a few times, we then work with the technique we have been given until a basic level of familiarity is achieved. Once we are able to relax during a session, to proceed without wondering what comes next, we are able to begin 'looking around'. At this stage, we find ourselves perceiving our new world - perceiving ourselves - in increasingly clear and revealing ways. Here the process cycles back on itself. For to see with still greater clarity, we must learn and familiarize again. And on it goes...

Many of us long for a more lush, real world. We know the speed and distraction of our modern ways are not nourishing. To find what the cool breeze and the blazing sun are telling us - to discover our own unfolding - we need to slow down and step out of our whizzing cars. As we have seen, however, this is not something one just does. It is, instead, a process. Thus, we continue with meditation practice because there is no other choice for us. There is no other way for us to make this journey into ourselves.

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