



WHY MEDITATE?

By Neil W. McKinlay



It is an interesting question: Why meditate? And while I suspect a definitive answer cannot be provided, I have developed a few personal reasons over the twenty-odd years that I have been practicing. Enjoyment and well-being are among these, but I think my main reply lay in the fact that meditation is simply the most effective means I have found for connecting with what one might call the more subtle aspects of life.

We live in busy and distracted times. We live with busy, distracted minds. From the moment we rise to the moment we drop off, there is noise and activity everywhere. This might not be a problem if we were able to truly attend to at least some of this activity, but such is not the case. We typically bounce from thing to thing, from appearance to appearance without ever settling on anything - without ever really seeing, feeling, hearing, experiencing anything at all.

As training in staying present, meditation counteracts this tendency toward movement and distraction. Placing our attention on the breath and working to keep it there, we finally begin to settle into what's happening in our lives. We begin to really see and hear and feel. The result of this can be surprising.

Slowly and steadily, we begin to discover there is much more to ourselves and to our world than we ever imagined. We walk into the day and see a breeze playing in the treetops. We encounter a friend and feel the distress etched in her face. We sit down to practice and find ourselves reliving an event we thought was long forgotten. In the course of our daily lives, we begin to hear an inner voice that sounds so familiar - though the direction it offers often challenges much of what we thought was true.

Put another way, I could say that meditation is the most effective means I have found for discovering the human life that is waiting to unfold through us. It is a means, then, of beginning to live - to really, truly live. When I think of the practice in these terms, the question "Why meditate?" starts to dissolve. In its place comes another: Why not?

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