

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Spring 2010



I often talk of a meeting. This took place in another community. It's theme arose from an observation: that while many try meditation, few remain engaged with it for any length of time. Much discussion arose from this.

Strategies were proposed. Classes put in place. A simple mentoring system was outlined.

Toward the end, one of the senior students in attendance, a relatively quiet Englishwoman, spoke. "I just think the path is hard," she said. According to the telling, her words were met with a moment of silence.

The meditative journey *is* hard. There is really no way to sugarcoat this. As my yoga teacher says, any genuine spiritual undertaking will by necessity challenge us. Engaged long enough, true spiritual practice requires we encounter that most difficult of entities: ourselves. The practice of embodied meditation certainly does this.

Here's how it works. When we direct our attention into the body and continue to do this in a deliberate way, we settle. We stay with the sensation of the breath or in the the big toe for longer periods. As this occurs, the body relaxes. Tension is released and we open up. Experience previously enfolded in patterns of holding are allowed to enter our awareness. We see them, feel them.

There is, however, a reason such experiences have been bound in tension. They don't typically fit our sense of who we are, how the world is, and what we can handle. Think of a love so open and unconditional it overwhelms us. To deal with this overwhelm, we cloak the love in physical holding. When the holding is dissolved, the love is loosed and encountered. This will still be overwhelming. It will still be challenging. Our task as mediators is to rest with this as long as we can. No easy task. Hence the comment: "The path is hard."

Acknowledging this is important for a couple reasons. First, it provides encouragement to stay with such moments. Often our impulse is to bolt. This is, for many of us, a familiar strategy. A wave of grief appears, and we suddenly are compelled to write emails and clean bathrooms.

Knowing the path is difficult prepares us. We are readied to welcome our grief and its accompanying flight response as an inevitable part of the practice. Then we return to the body. Then we come back to the belly. Then we see if we are able to stabilize in the quivering, tension-packed mass this area has become.

A second reason acknowledgment is valuable is it gives us permission to be gentle. I often assume I'm doing something wrong when challenges arise. I often think *I'm* wrong. This leads to a lot of aggression on my part, even more self-denigration when I throw my hands up, rise from my seat, and admit I just can't take this.

If we understand the practice is hard, then sometimes - *sometimes* - we will allow that the best we can do is take a break. I spoke with a woman several days ago. She was having a hard time getting to the practice. "It's not that I don't have time," she confessed. "Just stand near your cushion each morning," I suggested. "Admit you're having a tough go and stand there a few minutes." There was silence. "I can do that?" she asked with relief. Her own experience, I sensed, was now a little more approachable.

Some people feel talking about our journey's difficulty is disheartening. For me it is the opposite. Admitting this path is hard *is* *heartening* - it gives my heart back. It lets me acknowledge the reality of my own life. It gives me some perspective, encouragement, latitude, and permission in working with this. Thus, I often think of that quiet Englishwoman as speaking with a fearless roar in that meeting. "I just think the path is hard," she proclaimed. "Yes," I say to that. "Yes!"

Finding Our Lives: An All-Level Weekend Retreat

*Sat Apr 10 & Sun Apr 11
9:00 am - 4:30 pm
Queenswood Centre 2495 Arbutus Road
\$150 off-site \$250 on-site*

Alternating guided instruction with walking, silence, and discussion, the 'Finding Our Lives' retreats occur three times a year. Grounding our work together, these are a powerful way to explore both embodied meditation and the human journey. The intensive, retreat-style format allows a transformative degree of depth and connection to arise. Registration for Apr is still open - sign up today!

Next Weekend Retreat: Sat July 24 & Sun July 25

Other Retreat Opportunities

*Men's Meditation Retreat - Queenswood (May 28-30)
Register: 477 3822 or retreats@queenswoodvictoria.ca*

This offers men a chance to reconnect with their deepest beings. While in the supportive company of others, we will acknowledge the harmful effects of speed and distraction in our lives, and settle into the wisdom of our true selves.

*Summer-End Immersion - Monterey (Aug 30-Sept 3)
Register: 370 7300*

Suitable for new and experienced meditators, this five-morning immersion guides participants into a body-centered approach to meditation. The result is a deeper engagement of both this ancient practice and our lives.

*Meditation and Recovery - Queenswood (Sept 17-19)
Register: 477 3822 or retreats@queenswoodvictoria.ca*

Using the Serenity Prayer and Step Eleven as touchstones, this explores the role meditation plays in recovery. We will rediscover the stillness at the heart of our beings and consider how to connect with this in an ongoing way.

Please Note

As the viability of all events is determined in advance of their published start date, please register asap.

Spring/Summer Classes & Workshops

To ensure event viability, more all-level³ offerings are appearing on my schedule. Beginner¹ and continuing² students can consider these when looking for practice and instructional opportunities. Check my website for more about the spring/summer happenings in these locations:

Monterey Centre ^{1,2,3}	Gordon Head Rec ³
Queenswood Centre ^{1,2,3}	Juan de Fuca Rec ^{1,2}
Helga Beer Yoga Studio ¹	Fairfield Centre ³

For continuing students, a specially priced eight-week class will run May and June at Monterey. This offers two-hour practice sessions, which will allow us to explore the practice in even greater depth. Call 370 7300 to register.

Spiritual Coaching & Shamanic Consulting

These services encourage both meditators and non-meditators to enrich their engagement with living. Coaching has recently helped a number of individuals find an appropriate place for spiritual discovery in their daily lives. Shamanic consulting, on the other hand, has helped several people identify and work with and/or heal some of the challenges facing their personal unfolding.

Thursday Night Meditation Group

A meditation group meets each Thurs (5:30-7:30) to work with the body-oriented style of practice. This drop in/by donation gathering takes place at the Truth Centre on Fort St. For more info: dharmaoceanvic@gmail.com.

What Can I Do?

The Land Conservancy of BC is entering the final, *final* push to save Madrona Farm and ensure a future for land which produces 200,000 pounds of food annually. Only \$250,000 remains to be raised by May 15th. Donate by calling TLC at 479 8053 or visit blog.conservancy.bc.ca/.

- From Guy Dauncey's *EcoNews* (www.earthfuture.com)

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