

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Winter 2008



I have accumulated a number of spoken meditation practices over the years. Daily chants, liturgies for the full and new moon, others for a range of places and occasions. As this number has grown, I've been slipping them into a worn yellow folder. Not the most dignified resting place this: pages often get bent and out of order here, some have even gone missing.

It was with some excitement, then, that I found myself in an office supply store not long ago. Looking over the duo-tangs for sale, I was amazed. There were bright colors, flat colors, cardboard and plastic folders, covers ranging from smoky-black opaque to clear-sky transparent.

'These are perfect,' I thought, imagining separate binders for different types of practice. 'And they don't even cost much.' I mused. 'Maybe I should buy a few more.' At this, something shifted. I eyed the long shelves of product waiting for purchase and sighed. Putting the folder in hand back in its place, I turned and left the store.

Author Paul Hawken recently said, "The great thing about the dilemma we're in is we get to re-imagine every single thing we do. There isn't one single thing we make that doesn't require a complete remake. And so there are two ways of looking at that. One is like: Oh my gosh, what a big burden. The other way to look at it, which is the way I prefer, is: What a great time to be alive! This generation gets to completely change this world."

I think Hawken is right in recognizing these two ways of viewing our situation. He is, however, off in suggesting we can adopt only one. In truth, the horror of the first and delight of the second always appear side by side. The life-giving love we feel for our kids, for instance, always exists beside a sadness for those we have lost. If we feel either of these fully, the other blooms in our hearts.

The dilemma of which Hawken speaks is no exception to this. There is undeniable grief in the destruction we have wrought on this planet and the suffering this is causing. At the same time, however, there is joy. This arises when we allow our mourning hearts to open completely. In this moment - just when we feel we cannot take anymore - we realize the world is calling us.

We are being called to step beyond habitual ways. We are being called to leap into uncertainty - into a territory in which long-assumed values and perspectives no longer hold. In so many ways, the world is saying this cannot go on and these words are calling us to new modes of being.

None of us is immune to this. Even where the clamor and din of our consumer lifestyle seems to drown out river and mountain and sky, the call is there. And we all have an opportunity to answer.

This opportunity is particularly strong for anyone making the spiritual journey. Those who align themselves with something more fundamental than the flurry of discursive thought develop an ability to hear and see and feel what is not always perceived. Long hours of practice open us to the world. Hearing its call, we assume a responsibility to respond. We have a duty to ourselves: to our own experience. We have a duty to the world: to its deep wisdom. We have a duty to others: to show there is another way.

So I walked away from all those duo-tangs the other day. I remembered I had some three-ring binders that would do the job. They were not as slick as I had envisioned - they were not *new* - but they were already there and, thus, allowed me to avoid just one more purchase.

It was a small act, to be sure. But with so much sorrow in the world, it was a joyous one too. It was a step beyond the now life-threatening limits of habitual patterns. It was a tiny leap into the enormity of what might be possible for us.

Finding Our Lives: Talks on Meditation Practice

Having seen how much Ocean View participants gain from the talk transcripts that circulate after workshops, I have collected some of these in coil-bound and ebook formats.

The result - *Finding Our Lives* - helps us do just this. The volume takes us deeper into the meditative journey, connecting us with daily living in a fresh way and offering questions for further reflection. Check out 'Opening To and Trusting Life', the sample chapter on the 'Books' page of NeilMcKinlay.com. Then order your copy today.

Winter Meditation Schedule

As the the range of both introductory and continuing meditation events continues to increase, I am trying a new means of communicating upcoming dates with you.

When you click the 'Coming Events' link on the 'Meditation' page of NeiMcKinlay.com, a two-paged document will now come up. The first page lists upcoming introductory classes and workshops, the second lists events being offered to continuing meditators. Please visit this document soon. Begin planning your next few months so that meditation remains part of your life.

Continuing Events

As ongoing practice and instruction is an essential part of the meditative journey, the continuing classes and workshops being offered to anyone who has completed an introductory event with me are tremendous resources for all of us. This Winter, continuing offerings include:

- *Weekly Wednesday night classes at Monterey*
- *Monthly Ocean View gatherings at Queenswood*
- *Occasional Saturday morning practices at Monterey*
- *A three-morning intensive at Monterey Jan 2-4*

Please see 'Coming Events' for more details.

Other Workshops

With several new workshops arising in recent months, I have altered my website to better profile the widening range of my work. The 'Presenting' page now offers information about events not mentioned elsewhere. These include:

Parenting and the Spiritual Path helps us embrace the rich spiritual potential of this time in life. Workshops are slated for Royal Roads (Dec 1; 391-2600 ext 4801), Monterey (Feb 16 ; 370-7300), and Shoreline (Mar 11; 386-8367).

Simplify Your Life looks at the cultural causes of our harried lives, then considers both lifestyle and spiritual solutions. Workshops are slated for Monterey (Jan 9; 370-7300), Shoreline (Feb 19; 386-8367), and Gordon Head Rec (May 8; 475-7100).

The Five-Minute Refresh has yet to be slotted into my schedule. Highlighting the restorative power of the posture-work used in meditation workshops, this is an ideal workplace wellness event. Be in touch if you are interested.

Kick Start Your Meditation Practice

With New Year approaching, I again invite you to kick-start your meditation practice with a workshop/coaching package. This covers attendance at the Jan 12 and Feb 9 *Ocean View* gatherings, and four coaching calls in the weeks between. Cost is \$245 plus GST. If you have yet to do an introductory workshop, cost is \$260 plus GST.

Also Worth Noting

Dr Reggie Ray will be teaching a weekend program in Vancouver Jan 25-27. Though this marks my teacher's third visit in the past year, it remains an invaluable event. Let me know if you want me to pass along breaking news.

A small number of portable meditation benches are now for sale. Made from reclaimed lumber, these have been much appreciated by those who have already purchased one. Contact me if you want more information.

What Can I Do?

Embrace the holiday season as an occasion to actually lessen your typical impact. Reduce the number of things you purchase and times you go out. Pay attention to patterns of eating and drinking. Carve out time for quiet.

Thanks

Bruce Cox, Jennifer Walker, Gord Butterfield, Ali Thomas, Stephanie Prizeman, Renee Olsen.