

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Winter 2009



I did a short meditation retreat at Queenswood Centre over the summer. Though I had requested a room on the quieter side of the building for this - one facing away from the main parking lot and the steady stream of visitors coming from it - upon checking in, I found myself in a space whose view was precisely the one I had hoped to avoid.

For several hours I tried to make the best of this. At a certain point, however, I got up with a huff, gathered my cushion, and head out of doors. The centre rests in the heart of a small wood lot. Wandering one of its winding trails, I eventually found a cleared hollow where I expected to be able to meditate more or less undisturbed.

And this is what happened for the first little while. Through that initial morning, the air around me was virtually silent. On the odd occasion I would pick up the sound of a passing car or a distant voice - but that was it. Come the hours after lunch, however, I noticed a change. While I sat there unmoving, birdsong began to rise around me. Just before dinner, a group of deer crossed not a dozen feet before my seat.

The next day, this trend continued. Midmorning, an unseen presence skittered along my right side. Early afternoon saw a grey and white owl perch on a branch overhead. For the longest time, this creature seemed to have joined me in practice. Together we sat - eyes lowered, breath slow - until its wings suddenly spread. I heard a voluminous *swoosh* as the bird descended upon a mouse that was resting only five feet in front of me. My ears rang with the sound of the owl's graceful departure. My heart pounded loud and fast in my chest.

Through the rest of that day, I marveled at how I seemed to have been welcomed into a community of being over

my time in those woods. Sitting silent and still, the life of that place had gradually enveloped me, sharing some of its ways in the process. Though surprising, this struck me as a very natural occurrence. 'Of course I was welcomed,' I thought. 'Why would I not be?'

It was at precisely this moment that a chain saw cut my musings. This was followed by the high-pitched wail of metal gnawing at wood. Not too far away, someone was clearing land for development. A new house, another addition; through the trees I could not quite tell which. Though I tried for some time, I could not find my breath in that din - much less catch sight of the life that had surrounded me only minutes earlier. Frustrated, I picked up my stuff and returned to my room.

For the rest of the day I meditated. While doing so I felt myself sink further and further into a dark mix of anger, depression, hopelessness. After a few hours, these seemed to have blown an impenetrable cloud around me. I couldn't imagine any escape from destruction. I couldn't imagine anything other than ruin.

Then I caught a flicker of something beneath all this. Just a flicker at first; a momentary flash from the depths. It was almost imperceptible. Then it touched me with a warmth and openness that drew a tear from my eye.

This is now several months past. In the span since, I have failed to find words adequate to this experience. A few days ago, however, I heard the following. It speaks to the role of elders - the wisdom keepers - in a culture or community: "To see the horrors of our lives with clear-eyed accuracy while, at the same time, never losing sight of the beauty, wonder, and love at the heart of it all."

People sometimes ask me what meditation might bring to the times we inhabit, to this world. The words above seem as good an answer to this as any I can come up with.

Another New Year's Immersion

What better way to ring in 2009 than a five-morning meditation immersion? For the second year, Monterey Centre will open their doors during a 'downtime' in order to allow such an event to take place.

Suitable for meditators of all levels, these days feature guided practice, walking meditation, and daily talks. The one-week format affords an opportunity to explore our lives in a very deep way - so consider taking part!

*Mon Jan 5 - Fri Jan 9
9 am - Noon
Monterey Centre 370 7300*

Winter Classes & Workshops

Winter schedules for both introductory and continuing meditators are now on NeilMcKinlay.com. As always, new people are encouraged to get in touch should the list offer nothing that works with your circumstance - events are always being added and private instruction is an option.

Ongoing people will be excited to see that there are now three weekly classes. These take place Mon aft & Wed eve at Monterey, and Mon eve at Goward House. This group may also note that more 'Half/Full Day' sessions are taking place at Queenswood Centre. Mark your calendars!

Recommended Reading

After many requests, a reading list has been added to the 'Continuing Meditation' page of my website. This recommends seven titles in four categories, while saying a few words about each. Though by no means exhaustive, the list does offer a sense of where to begin with our study.

On a related note, I have several copies of Reggie Ray's *Touching Enlightenment* available for purchase. Contact me if you are interested.

Personal Meditation Coaching

Still impressed by the depth and energy personal coaching brings to people's practice lives, I continue to recommend this service to those who are interested. Check the 'Continuing Meditation' page for more.

5-Minute Refresh: Meditation At Work

The 5-Minute Refresh highlights the restorative power of the posture-work used in *Learning to Meditate*, allowing us to practice in as little as five minutes. Check the 'Introductory Meditation' page for more, and be in touch if you want to bring this event into your workplace.

Reggie Ray Events

In early '09, Reggie Ray is offering several programs relevant to us. Check DharmaOcean.org for more.

*Pacific Northwest Weekends
Jan 23 - 25 (Vancouver); Jan 30 - Feb 1 (Seattle)*

During these events, Reggie will guide us through a series of body-based practices that will allow us to come face to face with our unfolding journey.

*Meditating with the Body
Mar 31 - Apr 5 & Sept 8 -13 (Crestone, CO)*

Created for meditators of all levels, this training program includes two residential retreats and an at-home curriculum designed for optimum integration into our daily lives.

What Can I Do?

Livestock is responsible for up to 18% of gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. The problem starts with CO₂ from burning forests to grow feed. Then animals burp methane, and nitrogen fertilizer releases nitrous oxide - adding 4.4 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually. A study suggests each kg of beef is responsible for 30+ kg of CO₂.

The solution is to adopt a more vegetarian and vegan diet, to reduce consumption of beef, pork, lamb, and dairy. We need public education about the impact of livestock; carbon taxes that include methane and nitrous oxide; and an end to government support for the livestock industry.

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

Thanks

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