

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Spring 2009



People sometimes ask how becoming a parent has affected my meditation practice. This is an enormous inquiry, one I cannot answer with even approximate accuracy. Samantha's being is near pervasive in my life; the points of influence are too numerous to account for. Her presence resonates in when I practice, what I practice, how I practice. How to capture this in a single reply? Any attempt seems doomed to failure - though this does not mean I won't try.

Lately, I have been recalling an incident from Samantha's early years. She was sick with a cold or flu. I was laying with her in order to provide comfort while she wheezed through congested sinuses. My head was turned away here, hoping to avoid the germs I imagined swirling about like dust around Schultz's Pigpen.

At one point, Samantha decided to climb onto my chest. Her body was warm with fever, her touch damp. When she came in for a hug, I drew a quick breath and managed to hold it for the duration. The embrace released, she waited until I let my reluctant gaze meet hers. Her eyes were watery with illness. Evidence of whatever was ailing her leaked from her nose and crusted the corners of her mouth. She smiled and puckered for a kiss.

In my understanding, the central challenge of the meditative journey is presence: to simply be present to the good, the bad, for everything life offers. Our task is not to find some ideal state. Though this seems attractive, in truth, it only continues the endless searching, wanting, and evaluating so many of us are familiar with to the point of exhaustion. Rather, our task is to slowly, patiently develop an ability to be right here, right now. For it is here that our bodies speak to us. It is now that life shows us what is required. It is in this moment that we find our way. *This one. Right now.*

Given this understanding, it is interesting to look at myself in the moment just described. Reeling with fears of sickness and hopes for safety, I desperately wanted to push my ailing child away. I wanted to break free of her grasp, evade those waiting lips, and dash outside where I could strip off infected clothing, hose down, and breathe clean air. My arms were hard with the effort of holding her at bay. My torso pressed into the mattress below. This was not a moment of presence, obviously. Instead, it was something I know well: an instant in which I sought to flee the life before me in favor of something more comfortable, less threatening.

Many years have revealed something similar in my meditation practice. I often rush to my cushion wanting to escape the pressures of the day. I sometimes settle on the breath, interpreting its steadiness as a promise to clean up the mess of my situation. Feeling bad, I approach the practice as a way to feel better. Feeling good, I embrace meditation as a tool that will enhance and perpetuate this.

These are all attempts to strong-arm life - not to open or accept, but to manipulate, insist. And the effect? Samantha's expression twisted as she hung over me. The skin on her forehead showed confusion, the depths of her eyes hurt. 'Why are you holding me away?' I heard in my mind.

Then I relaxed. I smiled at my daughter's dripping face. I let her give me a wet kiss and held her close as she drifted into sleep. Unsurprisingly, I woke the next morning feeling ill - but something had shifted. The tenderness I had found for Samantha the night before had opened something inside me. We laughed a little more after that, she and I. We hugged more. Smiled at each other.

And since that evening, I have found this evident in my practice as well. There is a willingness to allow what I once avoided. In my better moments, at least, I will now let life throw her arms about me like a young, needing child and offer up a big, sloppy kiss.

Finding Our Lives:
An All-Level Weekend Retreat

Sat Jul 18 & Sun Jul 19
9:00 am - 4:30 pm
Queenswood Centre
2495 Arbutus Road
\$150 off-site \$250 on-site

Meditation reveals its power - and our lives - over time. It opens up a profound journey for us; the more energy and attention we give such travels, the further we go and the more we see. A weekend retreat offers a rare opportunity to immerse ourselves in this transformative practice. It presents an invaluable opportunity for personal discovery.

Alternating guided instruction with walking, silence, and discussion, this all-level retreat will explore the practice of embodied meditation as means to uncover and engage the human journey. The cost for those staying off-site is \$150 (including GST and lunches). The on-site cost of \$250 includes Saturday accommodation and required meals. Space is limited and registration is open - please sign up soon!

Summer Classes & Intensives

Monterey Centre (370 7300) and Goward House (475 7100) will be offering the usual range of Beginner and Continuing meditation classes during the month of July. These will run four-weeks starting July 6th and 8th.

No classes will run during August, though each of the above will offer week-long intensives through this month. Suitable for meditators of all levels, these feature guided practice, walking meditation, and daily talks. The Goward event takes place in the evening, while Monterey will again take place in the morning.

<i>Mon Aug 24 - Fri Aug 28</i>	<i>Mon Aug 31 - Fri Sept 4</i>
<i>7:00 - 9:00 pm</i>	<i>9 am - Noon</i>
<i>Goward House 475 7100</i>	<i>Monterey Centre 370 7300</i>

For the latest schedules - including information on offerings slated through May and June, and our monthly Queenswood gatherings - see NeilMcKinlay.com's 'Meditation' pages.

Western Communities & Saanich Peninsula

Recognizing a growing call for meditation in both the Western Communities and Saanich Peninsula, I am talking with rec centres about scheduling classes and workshops in these areas come Fall '09.

If you reside in either region and would like to be informed of local developments, please get in touch. Additionally, if you know of any appropriate venues other than the above, I would love to hear from you.

Dharma Ocean Events

In coming months, Dharma Ocean - Reggie Ray's umbrella organization - will be offering several programs relevant to us. Check DharmaOcean.org for more.

Salt Spring Island Retreat (with Tami Simon)
May 7 - 10 @ Stowel Lake Farm

Winter Dathun (with Reggie Ray)
Dec 13 - Jan 9 @ Crestone, CO

Touching Enlightenment

I still have copies of Reggie Ray's *Touching Enlightenment* for purchase. This detailed look at somatic meditation currently is the basis of our Queenswood talks.

What Can I Do?

BC and Alberta are Canada's only provinces to not have an Endangered Species Law. This leaves over 1600 species at risk in BC without adequate legal protection.

Go to www.saveourspecies.ca and sign the petition asking the BC government for such a law. You can also download a petition for your friends and neighbors to sign. Polls show 80% of British Columbians want such legislation.

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

Thanks

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