

LEARNING TO *news*

Occasional Reflections on Living

Spring 2007



My daughter and I were preparing to go outside. It was early. We had someplace to be. Trying to get the two of us ready, trying to tidy the house and grab some food, I glanced out a window and saw a ceiling of clouds overhead. Soft and gray, this extended from horizon to horizon. ‘Rain,’ I thought with a bit of frustration. ‘I should check the weather.’

Because I’ve never completely understood how to remedy this, my computer continues to make a loud “Chunnnng” when I turn it on. This sound ricocheted through the apartment for a few seconds when I went to check Environment Canada’s website. Drawn by the familiar ring, Samantha came into the room. Only one foot was soaked. The other was slipped bare into a far too large high heeled shoe.

“What are you doing?” she asked. “Checking the weather,” I answered while kneeling at the desk. “You go get ready.” In spite of this request, Sam stayed put. Together we watched the screen shift from gray to blue. A shiny silver apple told us the computer was booting up.

“You’re checking the weather?” she inquired. I nodded. ‘She probably doesn’t know about weather reports and websites,’ I told myself. ‘She likely doesn’t understand how one can check the day’s weather before going out.’ As the log-on screen appeared, I could feel her uncertainty radiating to one side of me. Typing my password, I could feel her curiosity. “Get ready, Sam. Okay?”

Through the workshops I offer, I am often asked what meditation is. To be honest, I don’t have a good answer to this. My sense of the practice has changed so much over the years that a rigid definition really makes no sense to me. Because I know it has often proven helpful to offer something, however, I try my best to answer this inquiry

when it arises. For the last while, I’ve been trying the following: “Meditation is about connecting with experience.”

This seems not a half-bad reply. We block out a lot of our lives as modern adults. We’re not interested in the chorus of sparrows above. The tug in our gut is treated as little more than a nuisance. The stunning insight we just had - well, studies indicate that this simply cannot be the case, so we forget about it. Our immediate experience is discounted and ignored in a lot of different ways; over time, meditation helps us re-connect with this.

Though it might seem an obvious course of inquiry, it is only lately that I’ve wondered how this sense of disconnect came about. How did we come to be so divorced from the world around us? How did we come to dismiss our own emotional lives? How did we come to trust experts so much more than our immediate sense of things? As is often the case, it is Samantha who has prompted these questions.

“Sam, get ready!” I insisted. She was still standing at desk-side. Turning, I saw the confusion in her features and paused. “What’s the matter?” I wanted to know. “You’re checking the weather?” she asked again. “Yes,” I said. By now the Environment Canada site was up. Beneath today’s forecast was a bank of clouds. The probability of precipitation, it told me, was high. “See, this says that it’s going to rain today. We should take our umbrellas.”

Sam’s head moved back and forth between the screen and my face for a few moments. She then stepped away from the desk and moved toward a nearby window. Sliding it open a little wider, she placed her small hand flat on the woven screen. Cool air rushed in all about us. There was a faint scent of rain on the breeze. “Why don’t you just do this?” she wondered, glancing out at the day. “Why don’t you just look outside?”

Reggie Ray in Vancouver

This past January, my meditation teacher - Dr. Reggie Ray - offered two weekend workshops in Vancouver. Inspired by the response, he has committed to return to the Pacific Northwest at least occasionally for the foreseeable future.

In addition to being the source of most of the material presented in my classes and workshops, Dr. Ray is one of North America's more inspiring spiritual teachers. A chance to work with him is not to be missed. If you would like to be informed of his next visit, please contact me. Check dharmaocean.org for more on his work.

Meditation Classes and Workshops

I will be offering numerous *Learning to Meditate* workshops in coming months. Check the 'Meditation' page of NeilMcKinlay.com; 'Coming Events' provides a schedule.

As always, several of these events will take place at Queenswood Centre. Dates and details are:

Sat Apr 21st • Sat May 19th • Sat June 16th
1:30 pm to 4:00 pm
Queenswood Centre 2625 Arbutus Rd
\$40 covers the workshop,
a guided CD, a yoga strap, a booklet and GST.

There will also be classes taking place at Gordon Head Rec Centre, Monterey Centre, UVic and Shoreline Community School. Again, see 'Coming Events' for details.

Workshop-Coaching Package Continues

The workshop-coaching package allows anyone now taking a meditation class or workshop with me to receive a 10% discount on four initial sessions of personal coaching. Conducted by phone, the one-on-one format allows us to address technique and practice. It also allows us to engage the task of folding the meditative perspective into daily life. As the results this service have been impressive, it will be continued indefinitely. Be in touch if interested.

Ocean View Home Groups

Open to anyone who has completed an introductory event, the *Ocean View Meditation Group* deepens the role

meditation plays in our lives and enriches our sense of the tradition presented by Chogyam Trungpa and Reggie Ray.

The main group currently gathers at Queenswood on the mornings of the above workshops. A 'satellite' has also taken shape in someone's home. If you have a collection of friends, family and acquaintances who are interested in practicing meditation together and would like to explore this option, please get in touch.

Meditation Immersions at Monterey

Oak Bay's Monterey Centre will be offering a five-morning meditation immersion the last week of August. Running 9:30 am to Noon, August 27th through 31st, this provides a unique opportunity to immerse in the practice of meditation. The program is open to everyone, meditators both new and experienced. The first day will overview *Learning to Meditate*; subsequent mornings will offer further exploration and ample practice. A similar event with shorter sessions (9:30 - 11:00 am) will run July 23rd through 27th. Contact me if you wish to know when registration opens.

Continuing Classes at Monterey

Also at Monterey is a possible weekly class for those who have done introductory work with me and want to continue with a regular group. Only tentative at this point, the class may be offered on a weeknight this fall.

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Thanks

Bob Howell, Ty Chandler, Robin Cantor, Neil Edwards, Marnice Jones, Gord Butterfield, Ni Namasivayam, Leanne Earnshaw, Making Tomorrow Conference, Our Children's Centre.