

## **Spirituality: Meditation**

By Dr. Nobody

I wish I could say I don't go to church because I am lazy. In fact, I am very devoted to meditation. And this came about because I am absolutely infatuated, as you might guess, with the idea of sitting still doing nothing. It is one thing to sit looking out the window, but it is another to pull down the eyes' window shade to the world and peer into, well, nothing. That takes another fascinating effort, yet the end result is somehow feeling a little peaceful about your life.

I have been meditating for over 27 years: an hour or so in the morning (after mailbox duties) and again in the evening before retiring. I read somewhere that it has been estimated that the average person thinks around 60,000 thoughts a day. I did the math on that: 60,000 thoughts divided by 24 hours equals 2,500 thoughts per hour, or 41.666 thoughts per minute, or .69444 thoughts per second. I guess the two-thirds of a thought every second is a full thought that got interrupted and cut off by another thought, which is kind of depressing when you think about it (whoops, there's another thought!). Our thoughts are like a bunch of gibbering monkeys climbing all over each other, vying for attention. This is why the Buddhists call it monkey mind.

Now, I'd like to think that I don't do much thinking when I'm sleeping. In fact, that is a main reason I sleep, to rest my mind and body. I did the math on that, of course, for the average person who sleeps an average of eight hours a night. It is funny that actuarians still consider the earth to be populated by average people. Those eight hours account for exactly 20,000 thoughts saved from being thought. But then you have to factor in those thoughts that occur in your dreams; I mean, when you are dreaming about some daring escapade or seduction, that takes thoughts too, doesn't it? I don't know about that, and the scientists I have approached with this query clearly have a big question mark above their head where the light bulb should be.

Let's assume that those 60,000 thoughts occur during waking consciousness. After all, it seems stupid to relieve yourself from thinking by sleeping and wind up thinking in your sleep up to 20,000 unwanted thoughts. When does a person get to relax? Don't answer that question; I'll tell you later. Well, if those 60,000 thoughts occur in the remaining 16 hours of the day . . . wait a moment, this isn't right, is it?: 3,750 thoughts per hour, or 62.5 thoughts per minute, or 1.041666 thoughts per second! Okay, I'll make it simple: that's one thought per second when I am bright-eyed and bushy-tailed! If you ask me, it is a darn good argument for going back to bed and sleeping as much as you can.

It is absolutely amazing what you can do with your mind in meditation. Would you believe I did the above math in a long reverie during meditation one morning? And that is exactly what you are trying not to do!

Meditation is an ancient technique of mind control. There are numerous approaches to meditation, most often dependent upon the teacher or teachings one chooses to follow. As a discipline with a long rich history behind it, meditation is most often associated with the East, especially India or China. No matter the source, meditation almost always uses techniques of concentration to focus the mind, and most often to focus the mind on God. Of course, this is where faith comes in: you have to believe that such an almighty force, Atman, Brahmin, Buddha or Christ nature exists within oneself and all others or else the whole purpose loses its purpose like a hot air balloon losing its hot air.

I follow a meditation approach that asks for the eyes to be closed and focused upward toward a point between the eyebrows. If you could magically see behind my eyelids you would probably see me weirdly cross-eyed, but somehow they stay anchored there. This form of meditation is perhaps the most common, and I quickly discovered when beginning that it was the safest, meaning the safest in which to catch a wink or two and still let others believe I am meditating. The philosophical approach behind meditating with closed eyes is to disassociate oneself from the world, to turn the focus inward. Researchers have determined that when one closes their eyes, which account for over 80% of all sensory stimulation, the brain wave pattern slows down into an alpha state. This has been called the Relaxation Response because it is, well, relaxing. This same alpha state of relaxation can be reached by daydreaming, hypnosis, sitting quietly in nature, listening to soothing music, watching television or a movie (the contents aren't important, just the hypnotic jigger of the screen), downing a brewski, smoking a joint, or falling exhausted after a nice round of love-making. I prefer to also include another form of relaxation dear to my heart: being voluntarily self-unemployed.

My friend, Jeff, practices another form of meditation that espouses the Zen approach: to receive life as it comes. For this reason he follows the instruction to meditate with eyes wide open. This is symbolic of acknowledging that life is suffering and that we must face all suffering head on, embracing it, understanding it, and accepting it. He, and many practitioners like him, sits in front of a blank wall and stares at something, anything, whatever exists and can be seen on that blank wall at his field of vision. It is sort of like your 4<sup>th</sup> Grade teacher, Mrs. Spleenhauser, punishing you by having you stand in the corner with your nose against the wall. Except now you are choosing such discipline in the name of your soul, not your smart alec remarks. I've tried such a form of meditation, and it certainly does get you quickly in touch with suffering. But once you get beyond the notion of foolishness, embarrassment, and hoping like hell that no one who knows you will suddenly enter the room and wonder what the hell you are doing, then you can begin to surrender to the absurdity of your mind. This absurdity, of course, has to do with your intent to overrule it by the simple act of focusing on a small spot on the wall and passing no judgment on any thoughts that happen to flutter in the way. Sounds simple, but the task is as difficult as if you had your eyes closed.

Let's face it, our mind is like an unruly child, and it is an imponderable job to whip the little buggler into shape, and to do so compassionately yet disassociatively. But for those who have the time or motivation to tackle life from the underdog position, meditation has great rewards. If you stay at it long enough, certain things begin to happen.

For me, I noticed that I actually could focus better in real life situations. For example, being at one with my toast as I spread marmalade on it, being at one with flossing my teeth, and being at one with meting out the exact change to the grocery clerk. I also increased my level of compassion toward others: on a typical summer day I trap hundreds of flies off my living room window in empty quart yogurt containers and release them outdoors; I willingly accept being Tricia's scapegoat and can handle her unwarranted verbal abuse at my lazy nature, knowing that she still loves me and is really directing the energy of old childhood wounds at her parents; and, I pray for all those in the world less fortunate than me that a coke bottle will fall out of the skies. I also have noticed that I actually do sleep less: a typical 12-hour nap has whittled itself down to eight, and a daydream takes only a minute to fly around the world in my hot air balloon. My anger over the years has also extensively diminished: fewer trees in the woods have gnaw marks on their bark, and more friends and family send me birthday cards. My level of hope for life has also increased: I am convinced that I am destined to win the world's largest Powerball sweepstakes without even entering it, as is true for the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes to end in year 2010; I have faith that Oprah Winfrey will single-handedly seek me out for her show; and, I am certain that every kid will someday go to bed not hungry. Of course, my level of acceptance of reality

has also increased: All sweepstakes are rigged, Oprah's pulling the plug on her show, someday you will be able to get a book form of Dr. Nobody's thoughts used with deep discounts on Amazon.com, and someday every kid will most definitely go to bed well fed. Many years of meditation has also done a good thing or two on my biology: because I am so relaxed, my resting pulse rate hovers above death, I have normal blood pressure and cholesterol levels, I don't have cravings (damn), and my eyes, being fairly normal, are only slightly cross-eyed. I might mention that I also have a more controlled sex life and am not desirous of Viagra. Let's just leave this statement like it is.

Perhaps the greatest benefit I have experienced from meditation goes back to the God concept. When I first started, I felt like the prodigal son returning to the all-encompassing brace of big Daddy. But many ways need amending and the path is so narrow that few can tolerate years of introspection. So, you must have faith that meditation and the spiritual path is all worth something in the end. Yet, if you focus on the end, you are likely to be disappointed. For example, I was convinced that nirvana and enlightenment would easily be in hand within years. In fact, given my meditation techniques, I had mathematically calculated that at the outmost I'd get the big glad-hand-out-of-the-sky exactly twelve years, four months, eighteen days, five hours, thirty-two minutes, and twenty-seven seconds from the day I had started meditating using the appointed esoteric techniques of concentration.

Today, time uncounted, except for it being 27 years later, I am happy as a clam. "Few expectations, few disappointments," as one saint said. You have to take each step of each day as it comes. You can't carry around the duffel bag of your expectations, desires, disappointments, anger, judgments, opinions, the memories of old flames, or even your secret meetings with God or Jesus or Buddha or Gandhi or Mother Theresa. Each step, each day, each meditation, and each prayer, if done so with heart, love, hope, compassion, respect, honor, gratitude, and reverence for life — each becomes a mini-flame of enlightenment and nirvana. Oh, did I mention humor in there also? In the eyes of the world, like me, you may be a Nobody, but you are a capital Somebody in the eyes of God. And isn't that all that counts when you have time and thoughts on your mind? I am Dr. Nobody.

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