

REFLECTIONS ON JANUARY 1, 2017 Russell Delman
“MEDITATION FOR WORLD PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE”
(Part 1)

Meditating for 10 hours in a day is challenging, exhilarating, boring and fulfilling. Some moments flow and some create discomfort, and like most other people, I sometimes experience unpleasant bodily sensations, random thoughts and a variety of feelings. In this writing, I will share some of my learning and reflections from this practice.

Gratitude for Interconnectivity

Before the day started, I heard from numerous friends and students living in more than ten different countries that they would be joining for parts of the day. As this is the sixth year of these day-long meditations, there has been time for the interest to spread. Knowing that other people are sitting at the same time brings a surprising sense of connectedness and support. I actually sense a living thread running through us. This touches my heart deeply and I am very grateful.

As I sit for the day, people come and go into “Sophia’s Sanctuary”, the retreat center created by my wife Linda and I in Sebastopol, California. Again the presence of others has a potent effect on my meditation and my sense of being part of a larger community holding these intentions.

Reading the Dedications to Social Justice also ignites a strong connectedness to living beings throughout the world and the human-created forms of suffering that I see. Bearing witness to these social injustices and speaking them out heightens consciousness. Even more, as a person of privilege who benefits from the currently dominant culture and unintentionally participates in some of these forms of bias, these days include a sense of acknowledgement to all marginalized people in our shared world. **With great privilege comes great responsibility.** Each day-long meditation brings a growing sense of my authentically felt field of care. As none of us can be free until all of us are free, I am grateful for this.

Background

The Embodied Life School hosts these days of meditation about every other month. Each day is divided into two, five hour periods. Fifty minutes of

sitting (with a soft bell for those who want to stretch after 25 minutes), followed by ten minutes of walking meditation, repeated ten times during the day. We begin each hour by reading a short “Dedication” to a particular aspect of social justice. {In part 2 of this writing, I will share each of these, along with some commentary}.

Reading the Dedications

This reading frames the hour and instantly connects us with those who are experiencing the effects of that particular injustice. Each dedication is also repeated at the beginning of the walking meditation. We always end the reading with a positive image of a future in which, due to the changes in human consciousness, this form of suffering no longer exists.

I notice that reading these dedications inspires my practice. I am no longer sitting for myself only, I am holding in my heart: 1) people who are suffering in these ways, which includes both the perpetrators and victims and 2) my participation in the systemic structures that perpetuate this reality. It is humbling to acknowledge that many of the advantages I have experienced in this life arise from historic biases that make the same possibilities more difficult for others. The practice is to acknowledge it, feel it and let it go – returning to the physical reality of the present moment. The letting go is connected to the meditation practice, later one might initiate action based on their insights.

Embodied Meditation

In “Embodied Meditation”, we focus on the present moment by continually grounding ourselves in physical reality. The sense of weight and breathing are the center, along with the sounds, sights, (our eyes are a little open) and other body sensations. We also notice the thoughts and feelings that arise.

There is a subtle, important difference in this practice during these all-day meditations as compared to our daily meditation. Here, in the moment of noticing any “absencing”, we briefly recall the particular aspect of social justice that we are holding in our hearts. This remembrance is followed by returning to the next breath. I notice that including the suffering of others in this way potentiates my practice, my compassion and my commitment. It is as if I am sitting FOR and WITH the people both now and throughout history who have suffered from this transgression, as well as including my

unintended collusion, in its occurrence. Over and over we do this dance – resting in presence, noticing our “absencing”, briefly recalling the particular domain of social justice, letting go into presence by sensing the next breath...

A few further observations:

* Stillness is a great gift. It begins with quieting the physical body, creating space for subtle phenomena to emerge with clarity. In moments of silence, in impactful yet simple ways, the ordinary becomes deeply satisfying. THIS breath, THAT chirping of a bird, THE light on the carpet can become profoundly fulfilling. There is a completeness, a sense of “enough-ness” in the ordinary. Great gratitude arises in these moments.

* At other times, the ordinary evokes something like “is that all there is”, a kind of bored, sad, empty feeling. We all carry something like a “sacred wound” from our basic separation from “all”, that occurs at birth. In Embodied Meditation, our practice is to enter into the direct experience of “the wound” when it appears, feel it and then return to the following breath.

Again, before coming back to the breathing, we include the aspect of social justice that is our focus for that hour. Importantly, we can see that each of these forms of injustice creates more separation for the oppressor as well as the oppressed, thus adding to the wounded-ness of everyone. Including the suffering created by the dominant ones *on themselves* helps to remind us that this change of consciousness is not top-down. Recognizing that the oppressor is also deeply hurt by the act of oppression, while not equivalent, seems essential to me.

* A beautiful image came to me numerous times during this day and emerges even as I write this now. Three times after reading a dedication, I experienced something like a blue cape or shawl coming out of each of my sides, enfolding suffering beings throughout the world in this field of care. I too, was enclosed within the warmth of this vast fabric. This is the first time I have experienced this spontaneous image.

* One final comment - almost all my moments in meditation can be described in three categories: 1) satisfying, often deeply fulfilling, simple experiences of being alive, 2) inner resistance or struggle while still present to the moment, and 3) absencing into a kind of virtual reality, often through

a fantasy about the future. The latter arises out of inner resistance to just being alive in the moment. *This, for me, is the edge of sitting practice.*

When committed to returning to the present moment without judgments or aggression and choosing presence over even entertaining fantasies, we enhance our capacity for authentic living. Sitting through uncomfortable “wounds” is as important as the delightful moments, maybe more so.

Further, when our struggles are no longer creating separation between ourselves and others, our humanity deepens. This is one of the surprising gifts of the all-day meditations. I notice that often, in the past, my pain was a source of isolation not connection. Connecting personal struggles to the suffering of other people, we are no longer alone. This opens an unexpected doorway to our generous and tender heart.

Meditating many hours in a day is richly fulfilling and challenging. I have a sense that I am entering into the heart of humanity as my personal heart opens further. My gratitude for this open door is great, deep and wide. In part 2 of this writing, I will explore each of the dedications and how they are unfolding for me.