

OPEN MOMENT MEDITATION: Reflections on the infinite possibility of the arising moment
February 2008 newsletter

Train-riding Vienna-Munich
Window gazing, inner sensing
Each moment new arising
White mountains, gray clouds, blue sky
Heart beating, weight shifting
Next moment completely free
Yet, constrained by the track
Completely free and constrained
Our unfolding life.....

She was about 45 years old and claimed that she could not meditate. She had tried a few times in the past but meditation was impossible for her because her mind was just too busy. I asked her if she thought meditation was a form of mind control. She said "of course".....

Many forms of meditation emphasize an attitude of controlling the mind and attempting to fixate attention. These concentration practices can be helpful and often lead to extremely pleasant inner experiences. For true freedom in our everyday life, however, I suggest that a wholly different inner atmosphere is more helpful. I call this practice "Open Moment Meditation".

Most people, most of the time are identified with the stories arising in their minds. Often a sad memory, an anxious feeling or an ache in the back can seem overwhelming. How life changing it is when we learn "the backward step" of observing the arising phenomena. This observing is not a severing from life, it includes, when possible, a "taking care of the moment" with a non-judgmental, curious and warm attitude. What a key 'move' this non-identification coupled with deep acceptance is! Without such a shift of viewpoint we are bound to repeat the thought patterns and self-identifications of the past.

"Nasrudin was sitting eating one hot chili after another with tears dripping from his eyes. A good friend asked "Nasrudin, why to you keep eating those hot peppers? He replied, 'I am waiting for a sweet one' ".

The good news, THE REALLY GOOD NEWS is that we have the capacity to shift the habits of thought and feeling that are at odds with our true sense of Self. We can even be grateful, perhaps begrudgingly, for the queasy stomach or pressured chest because these are signs from our inner life that something is askew. How good it is that we don't feel at peace with our own falseness and inner contradictions. What important motivation this is for returning to the wholeness and authenticity which is our birthright (after all for much of our childhoods we did feel whole and often without artifice).

.....she continued, "if you can't stop the thoughts you can't meditate". I suggested an experiment, "imagine that you are interested in the various appearances that life can take in a given moment. Kind of like watching a movie, imagine that the various sensations, thoughts and feelings are not so personal, not expressions of 'you', rather they are expressions of life. You are an anthropologist or biologist (I knew she was a professor of science) studying the appearances of life". With a skeptical look and bemused smile, she agreed to try.....

So what is this "Open Moment Meditation"? Let's start with an image. You are sitting on a train, gazing out into the sky. Sometimes clouds are moving through the open space followed by a large patch of blue, and then you are looking through the branches of trees that are close to the tracks. Each moment there is a change. Once a moment has arisen it is the only possible moment which could have arisen- it is absolutely 'what is'. In the instant prior to the arising of a moment, that soon to be moment lives in a field of infinite possibility. We literally do not know what is coming. How pregnant with possibility our life is!

....."Well, I must say that is more interesting but still I find myself lost in thought a lot of the time". "Now", I suggested, "have a soft intention to guide yourself back to the present moment. You can, for brief periods, choose to follow five breaths from beginning to end or intentionally scan through your bodily sensations, this will give you some sense of groundedness. After 30 seconds or a minute, let go of that focus and sense what is alive in your experience. After some time, your mind might again seem quite busy or dreamy, no problem. Your gentle intention is to return to presence by first noticing where you are in the moment of waking up, sensing yourself and then letting go into the next breath. Do your best to be free from judging yet also sense and welcome the judgments if that is what appears". "Okay", she replied, actually appearing intrigued.....

When we combine the vast blue sky- the spaciousness of our nature- with the bright, warm sun of complete acceptance we are practicing "open moment meditation". Now it is very, very important that we drop any kind of idealization or perfectionism. Picture this: you are sitting with the intention to be awake to the moment. After some time you awaken to the fact that for the previous minute (5 minutes, 10 minutes?) you have been lost in an inner story or conversation. For many of us, faster than the speed of light, a self-judgment arises. This moment is often followed, just as fast, by a judgment of the judgment. How amazing! Just at the moment of awakening, at the time when we are actually realizing our intention to be awake here and now, rather than celebrating, we fall into our habits of judgment. Well, perfectionism is often the curse of the disconnected and needs to be abandoned by all who want to be intimate with life. Simply dropping the story of how we "should" be meditating and welcoming the arising phenomena is easily half the journey.

..... "This is actually fascinating" was her first comment after our final experiment. "When I don't fight the body sensations or thoughts yet also don't just let my mind run me around there is a real settling down inside. There are still a lot of thoughts but more quiet moments also. When you said that I am not responsible for the random, weird, sometimes entertaining things that appear in my mind and that my job is just to return gently to the present moment, I did not actually believe you. After trying it, something really nice happened".

What if you sit in this moment with nothing more than an inner sense of curiosity about the unfolding of life? You are sitting on the brink of the infinite potential of the next moment. Maybe Life, your life, does not need you to predict it, control it, improve it or change it, maybe just maybe, we can satisfy our relationship with life by being an open field in which the sun warmly shines.