

Reflections from the Nov. 12 All-Day Meditation

Russell Delman November 2017

For seven years, I have been sharing a practice in which we meditate continuously for many hours. Last Sunday, the day consisted of two, five-hour periods of sitting and walking meditation, dedicated in gratitude, to our oneness with the earth. People ask me, why ten hours in a day? What is the point? What is the value?

First, I don't know that this is a helpful practice for others. I guess for some people it is and for some it is not. I will describe some of the value I perceive for myself.

After more than 45 years of Zen meditation, I find that the path is endless and the learning continuous. Daily practice is usually a great gift and joy, a returning to the most authentic and simple sense of Being Alive! I am forever grateful for the indescribable gift of zazen (sitting meditation).

Mind-Fullness, Body-Fullness, Heart-Fullness

This meditation is not based in a rigorous form of mind control or concentration. Rather, the intention is to, first, rest in and return to Presence as our ground state, noticing anything that is added to the basic facts of the moment. Grounding in the bodily posture is emphasized. **Equal to mind-fullness is body-fullness!**

Second, the intention is to cultivate a warm heartedness toward whatever arises - **heart-fullness**. If there is a struggle or aversion toward an uncomfortable bodily sensation, a painful feeling or disturbing thought, the intention is to befriend the reactivity. We keep returning over and over to the basic facts of the moment, including any reactions, without judgment. Simply put, this is being with “what is” while noticing all the opinions, preferences, desires, thought streams, etc. that appear with loving-kindness. Even hate, anxiety, boredom (or your least desirable state) are met, as much as possible, with care. When caring is not possible, then we greet the “not possible” with kindness.

Three Interconnected States

Naturally, when sitting for many hours, diverse states arise. Though infinite in variety, for simplicity, I put these in three categories:

1) Sometimes there is the joy and lightness of being carried by something larger than “myself”. There is a sense of *grace*, an effortless quality of interconnectivity. I liken this to floating down a lovely, wide river in a boat, carried by the current, with little need for paddling.

2) At other times, there is the gentle, repetitive work of returning to the present moment. There is enough intention, energy and commitment to keep “doing” the practice. This often creates conditions in which one “falls into” the grace of effortless meditation. This is like needing to paddle in

the river, steering back into the center where the current can take over again.

3) In these moments, the historic self-identity asserts its desire for life to be different than it is: perhaps for the day to be over, a warm bath or some other kind of pleasure. One sees the diversionary tactics of historic self - now the paddling becomes more effortful, like being caught in challenging rapids or stuck in the mud. New parts of the river are experienced and it can be very difficult.

At these times, one watches the mind spin, creating worlds, the original “virtual reality”. Planning for the future, reviewing moments of joy or regret, reciting poems or making lists.... all might appear. The raw experience of one’s **strategies of absencing**, the opposite of presencing, appears in graphic detail. Since these mind states are usually operating without awareness in daily life, it is very revealing to spend time with “the one who does not want to be present!” These moments are essential for our deepening and unfolding.

The Gift of Awakening

Transformation is the process of shifting the historic self-identity based on thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations to the **larger space of Being** in which all of these passing states are occurring. It is NOT that the historic self-identity is unimportant or eliminated; rather it is seen in a larger context. I learn to take care of those - “Russell’s” - rather than being identified with them. This includes the “Russell”

who thinks he is in control of all the voices, feelings, opinions, etc.

This shift of identity is the fundamental gift of awakening. Again, it is NOT about getting rid of thoughts and feelings or eliminating the “ego”, but of having one’s house in order. Essential Being is the space in which EVERYTHING from our past is included and integrated. Sitting for long periods allows the workings of the historic self to become obvious and any sticky places to be revealed. In a way, it is like spending time with a friend. Meditating each day has the delight of visiting a good friend for a short encounter. Sitting for long periods is like spending a much longer time with your friend, allowing both greater depth AND more challenging disagreements or disparate needs to appear.

Wearing out the Mind

Long sitting wears you out; it can be really hard work. It is like a marathon runner reaching a point where she realizes it is not possible to continue. In this moment, a new source of energy from some larger place might arise. There is a giving up and letting go. An inner shout or whisper says, “Please help me”. There is the humility of acknowledging: “ ‘I’ can not do this, it is too much”.

Before the historic self lets go of its desire for control, it will likely protest by generating many disturbing thoughts, images, feelings and sensations that make it all feel impossible. Getting to this point, though painful, can be a

very helpful opportunity (again not for everybody and not always, respecting our limits is essential).

Carried by Grace and Awakened Mind

Over time, one discovers that larger Being, never goes away, it is either in the foreground or background. The experience of grace or awakened mind is either present or very close by. Having this experience, literally- in the marrow of our bones, brings great confidence, even when life is difficult. By grace or awakened mind, I mean the clear sense of being carried by a larger “something”, whether we call it God, Life, True Self or Big Mind. We know that our historic self-identity lives within a much larger, generous and benevolent space. My gratitude for this realization is endless.

If it seems right for you, I hope you will join me on January 1, 2018 for the next day devoted to this practice.

More information can be found on my website