

The Art of Meditation

Class 2: recounting & elaborating on the Objectives of the Course

Today I want to go over and re-confirm the objectives of our meditation course ... which are three-fold:

1. You are taught the correct sitting position, the importance of sitting in the (half-) lotus pose, i.e. upright, with a straight back. You're also taught correct breathing (where you breathe deep down to your diaphragm) as well as the use of a mantra, or Ohmmm; you may also simply count your breaths. Each breath-in/ breath-out lasts about 6 seconds, i.e. 10 breaths per minute = roughly 200 breaths for a 20 minute meditation session; concentrating on your breath will keep your mind from thinking of other things. Which brings us to point two ...
2. Meditation means fighting the mind. The objective of *true* meditation is to still the mind. Only once we have overcome the restless nature of our mind can we concentrate on the desired benefits of meditation: With a clear mind we are able to employ coherent, logical, unbiased thinking ... indeed 'quality-thinking', potentially with a fresh outlook on the issues that need fixing in our lives.

Please note: This 'clear thinking' is the interim goal of meditation, a step on the path of our life-long journey to enlightenment, where we 'get real' and - free of the restrictions and biases of our ego - see the world the way it really is.

3. Finally the classes seek to instill in you the understanding that for meditation to have an impact you need a routine, you need to meditate regularly ... i.e. 20 minutes every morning; this is an important aspects of the course: If you don't meditate regularly in a formal session (say, every weekday) and at the same time every day, your time spent at the course may be un-productive.

Note: Let me address the issue that some people attending are very time-poor, especially in the morning. You may have to be creative and develop your own routine; alternatively to the early morning meditation on weekdays, you may want to schedule a couple of formal meditation sessions on the weekend and then conscientiously engage in a few informal sessions during your work-day.

To that end, let me reiterate one aspect of meditation I talked about last week, where we may wish to supplement our formal meditation with informal meditation ... the 'walking' meditation, the 'doing-household-chores' meditation etc.

These informal meditations can be used effectively to achieve a specific, immediate benefit: You can do a mindful meditation right before you start a project that you find daunting, a powerful mantra here is: "*This too shall pass ... I will be alright*"; in fact we can meditate on any issue demanding attention and requiring resolution. Such informal meditations (where we indeed *do* concentrate our mind) may lead to resolve and achievement (remember, though, this is not *true* meditation).

Eventually, in the long term, if you stick with and follow the meditation principles we're talking about, meditation will become a way of life. You will learn to make the benefits of meditation work for every aspect of your life ... your work, your job, your relationships and indeed generally for your own wellbeing, where meditation has shown to be beneficial in areas of physical and mental health. I have on my website a page THE SCIENCE OF MEDITATION, with many details of meditation benefits.

But let me stress just how important your own input into this '*meditation is a way-of-life*' thing is. The benefits you'll receive from meditation are in direct proportion to the level of meditation practice you commit to. If you embrace this new routine in your life, and - furthermore - if you familiarize yourself with the theory, the principle ideas of meditation (i.e. meditation = fighting your mind), then the benefits will follow automatically, they are natural progressions.

As regards informal & movement meditation, it's probably a no-brainer that we all should interrupt our desk- and computer-bound work-routine regularly; so schedule a walking meditation every hour and have a little meditation session before your lunch. But you have to be willing, determined and strong ... set the timer on your smart phone and organize for a colleague to help with your tasks (answering the phone?) Make co-workers aware of what you're doing, and why. And as ever: Be consistent.

At the beginning of our classes we do a few stretches to loosen the body ... specifically the lower back. Get into the habit of doing these exercises at home too, they are meant to prepare you for sitting still in the (half-) lotus pose for a certain length of time. As with all exercises in Unity Gym, emphasis is on a straight back; I'm no exercise specialist ... to learn more, do Zen-flex classes and talk to Matt.

Furthermore, correct breathing is as important as doing the exercises correctly. Especially in the beginning of becoming a meditator combine the flow of your breath with your mantra or Ohmmm. The idea is to breathe in deeply - right down to the bottom of your lungs - and as you exhale, to repeatedly correct your sitting position, where you stretch the torso up, and straighten your spine ... center yourself.

Finally, remember the Zen connection of our meditation: Simplicity and resolve ... not to say discipline; but remember also: Meditation is the ultimate 'Me-Time'.

