

PART ONE

Allow Everything To Be As It Is

We're going to investigate the whole notion of meditation, what meditation is, why we meditate, and what meditation can lead to. I want to explore what I call True Meditation, which you'll come to realize as I describe it is actually something quite specific and also something quite different from the kind of meditation that most people are used to hearing about. But first, a little personal history.



Ending the War with the Mind

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I came from the Zen Buddhist tradition, and in the Zen tradition, there is a long history in which the primary practice is meditation. In Zen, you often meditate for hours a day in the seated meditation posture for a prescribed period of time. And what I found out through many years of practice in this style of meditation is that I actually wasn't particularly good at it. I think a lot of people find when they first begin to meditate that they're not particularly good at it—their minds are busy, their bodies want to be twitching, and it's hard for them to calm down and be quiet. So my experience from the beginning was that meditation was actually very difficult for me to do. And I find for a lot of people it is something that is actually very difficult for them to do.

So I found myself sitting, on various retreats and at home. At home I would sit for maybe half an hour or an hour a day, sometimes longer. I would go on retreats and sit for much, much longer periods of time. And very often my meditation was actually anything but meditation. It was a lot of struggle, a lot of trying to calm my mind, a lot of trying to control my thoughts, and a lot of trying to be still, without much success—except for a few magical moments when meditation just seemed to happen. Because I wasn't particularly gifted at meditation initially—at being able to control my mind and enter

into a meditative state—after some years I realized that I needed to find a different way to meditate. The approach I was using clearly wasn't working. This is when I began my investigation into what I call True Meditation.

One day I was speaking with my teacher, and she said, “If you try to win the war with your mind, you'll be at war forever.” That really struck me. At that moment I realized I had been viewing meditation as a battle with my mind. I was trying to control my mind, to pacify my mind, to try to get my mind to be quiet. Suddenly I thought, “My goodness, forever is an awfully long time. I must come up with a whole different way of looking at this.” If continuing this way meant I was going to be at war with my mind indefinitely, I needed to find a way not to be at war with my mind. Without even knowing it I started to investigate, in a quiet and very deep way, what it would be like not to be at war with my own mind, with what I felt, with my whole human experience.

I started to meditate in a different way. I let go of the idea of what meditation was supposed to be. My mind had had a lot of ideas about meditation. It was supposed to be peaceful; I was supposed to feel a particular way, mostly calm. Meditation was supposed to lead me into some deep state of being. But because I could not master the technique of meditation as it was being taught to me, I had to discover a different way of meditating, one that wasn't oriented around a technique. So I would sit down and let my

experience simply be, in a very deep way. I started to let go of trying to control my experience. That became the beginning of discovering for myself what True Meditation is. From that point on, that shift—moving from trying to perfect a technique or discipline to actually letting go of technique and discipline—started to inform the way I engage in meditation.

An Attitude of Innocence

Our ideas about meditation are usually colored by our past conditioning—what we’ve learned about it, what we think meditation is, where we think it should lead. Meditation can serve a whole array of agendas. Some people meditate for better physical or emotional health or to still their bodies or minds. Some people meditate to open up certain subtle energy channels within their bodies, often called *chakras*. Some people meditate to develop love, to develop compassion. Some people meditate in order to achieve altered states of consciousness. Other people meditate to try and gain certain spiritual or psychic powers—what they call *siddhis*. And then there’s meditation as an aid to spiritual awakening and enlightenment. It’s this kind of meditation—meditation that is an aid to spiritual awakening and enlightenment—that really interests me. It’s what True Meditation is all about.

It doesn’t matter whether one is brand new to meditation or has been meditating for a long time. What I have found is that history doesn’t really make any difference. What matters is the attitude with which we engage the process of meditation. The most important thing is that we come to meditation with an open attitude, an attitude that is truly innocent, by which I mean an attitude that’s not colored by the past, by what we’ve heard about meditation through culture, through the media, or through

our various spiritual and religious traditions. We need to approach the notion of meditation in a way that is fresh and innocent.

As a spiritual teacher, I've met a lot of people who have meditated for many, many years. One of the most common things I hear from many of these people is that, despite having meditated for all this time, they feel essentially untransformed. The deep inner transformation—the spiritual revelation—that meditation offers is something that eludes a lot of people, even those who are longtime practitioners. There are actually good and specific reasons why some meditation practices, including the kind of meditation that I was once engaged in, do not lead to this promised state of transformation. The main reason is actually extraordinarily simple and therefore easy to miss: we approach meditation with the wrong attitude. We carry out our meditation with an attitude of control and manipulation, and that is the very reason our meditation leads us to what feels like a dead end. The awakened state of being, the enlightened state of being, can also be called the *natural* state of being. How can control and manipulation possibly lead us to our natural state?

Relinquishing Control and Manipulation

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Enlightenment is, in the end, nothing more than the natural state of being. If you strip it of all the complex terminology and all the complex jargon, enlightenment is simply returning to our natural state of being. A natural state, of course, means a state which is not contrived, a state that requires no effort or discipline to maintain, a state of being which is not enhanced by any sort of manipulation of mind or body—in other words, a state that is completely natural, completely spontaneous. Herein lies one of the reasons why meditation often leads to a dead end. Many meditation techniques, when you look at them closely, are a means of control. As long as the mind is controlling and guiding our experience, it is unlikely to lead us to a natural state. A natural state is one in which we are not controlled by the mind. When the mind is involved in control and manipulation, it can lead to various states of consciousness: you might learn how to still your mind, or you might come into psychic powers. You can achieve a lot of things through a style of meditation that is basically technique-oriented or manipulation-oriented. But what you can't do is come upon your own natural and spontaneous way of being.

This seems like the most obvious thing in the world. Anyone can tell you that you're not going to come to a natural and spontaneous way of being through inner control and

manipulation, yet somehow this truth eludes us. It eluded me for years. The fault isn't necessarily in the style of meditation or even in the technique, although the technique we use can have a profound influence. *The problem lies in the attitude with which we engage meditation.* If our attitude is an attitude of control and manipulation—if we take the approach that we are going to master a discipline—then the attitude gets in the way. It's actually the mind or the ego that is meditating. And, of course, when we are talking about enlightenment or spiritual awakening we are talking about awakening *from* the mind, awakening *from* the ego. In what I call True Meditation, this tendency of the mind to control and manipulate and be disciplined is abandoned from the very beginning. This letting go of control and manipulation is the foundation of True Meditation. As funny as it sounds, the extraordinarily simple beginning to meditation is to let go of control, let go of manipulation.

When most people sit down to meditate the first thing they think is, “Okay, how do I control my mind?” That's what I am calling manipulation. Manipulation is a strong word, but I am using it to get your attention, to call attention to the fact that when we sit down to meditate and ask ourselves, “Okay, how am I going to control my mind? How am I going to come to peace? How am I going to come to stillness?”, what the mind is actually doing is asking, “How do I control myself so that I feel better?” And you can learn to control your mind and quiet your mind

and your body by applying a controlling technique. For a while it might feel good. But when we control our minds in order to obtain a certain state of peace or tranquility, it's very much like getting someone to be quiet by taping their mouth shut. You've succeeded in getting that person to be quiet, but you've done it through a very manipulative technique. What good will come of getting that person to be quiet by taping their mouth shut? As soon as you take the tape off they are going to have a few things to say, aren't they? They're going to have an awful lot to say! I think anybody who has meditated knows the experience of entering into meditation and achieving a certain control of mind, a control of body. It may feel very, very good. The experience may even feel profound. But then you stop meditating—you get up off the cushion or the chair, you stand up—and immediately your mind starts to chatter again. We experience a type of meditative quietness through control, but as soon as we let go of control the mind is off and running again. Everything reverts to the way it was before. Most meditators are all too familiar with this dilemma. We may achieve a certain state of peace when we are meditating, but when we stop meditating the peace eludes us once again.

Real meditation is not about mastering a technique; it's about letting go of control. This is meditation. Anything else is actually a form of concentration. Meditation and concentration are two different things. Concentration

is a discipline; concentration is a way in which we are actually directing or guiding or controlling our experience. Meditation is letting go of control, letting go of guiding our experience in any way whatsoever. The foundation of True Meditation is that we are letting go of control.

For a human being to let go of control is actually an immense thing. It sounds easy to say, “Just let go of control.” But for most human beings, our entire psychological structure, our entire psychological self, our egos, are made up almost entirely of control. To ask a mind or an ego to let go of control, then, is a revolutionary idea. When we let go, even for a moment, certain hidden fears and hesitations arise. “What if I let go of control,” the mind says, “and nothing happens? What if I sit down to meditate, letting everything be as it is, and nothing happens?” This is usually why we grab on to some technique or to some discipline, because the mind is afraid that if it lets go of control, nothing will happen.

What I am suggesting in True Meditation is that we actually *see*, that we look at meditation as a way to investigate. True Meditation really isn’t a new technique so much as it is a way of investigating for yourself—in your own body, in your own mind, upon your own authority, upon the authority of your own experience—what happens when you start to relinquish control and allow everything to be as it is. What happens when you allow your experience to be exactly as it is without trying to change it. Instead of a