



Editor's Note: Welcome to the Department of Meditation, where you are treated to the ageless wisdom and inimitable wit of our very own meditation guru, Constance Wilkinson, psychotherapist and card-carrying Buddhist.

Constance welcomes your feedback and questions about meditation at triptych2@gmail.com

Department of Meditation

by Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA

Taming the Mind: *Special Holiday Edition!*

The big secret to taming the mind (Special Holiday Edition!) is: 1) there's no secret and 2) there's nothing special. Which is not to say that these two points are insignificant. (Pardon my sentence fragment. I did it on purpose, and I may do it again. Forewarned is forearmed.)

In my last column, I outlined a very straightforward daily meditation that, when actually practiced, produces helpful results. I mentioned, I'm sure, that in order to achieve these helpful results, you must actually do the practice, and keep doing it, in order that the desired results occur.

Just reading an article on meditation won't accomplish anything, just as staring longingly at a bottle of medicine without opening the bottle and swallowing pills as directed won't do much beyond making your eyes tired from staring. The medicine can't make you feel any better if you don't let it work. It can't work if you don't take it.

In the same way (yes, you've been waiting for it, and here it is at last: the holiday reference!), you may go out and buy all the ingredients you need to make, say, an absolutely fantastic traditional Christmas Pudding –

--tracking down the finest Korintje cinnamon from Indonesia, the most fabulous nutmeg and mace from Grenada, legendary allspice from Honduras, the most desirable cloves from Ceylon and Madagascar, magical pink ancient-sea-salt from the Himalayas, super suet (super suet?), India tree dark muscovado sugar from Mauritius, grated quinces, chopped figs, Moroccan apricots, glace cherries, special Zante currants, Muscatel raisins, luscious golden sultanas, etc., etc. –

– you may have assembled all these absolutely fantastic, magically desirable holiday ingredients and have downloaded and printed out Nigel Slater's terrific Christmas Pudding recipe – but if all this then just sits there and sits there and sits there on the counter, unassembled, untouched, undone, unused, uncreated, well, there just won't be any Christmas Pudding at Christmas, will there?

That's the real concept of karma, not punitive, but rather scientific: the law of cause and effect. And here: no cause, no effect. No cooking, no pudding.

Likewise, if there is no meditating, there will be no effect of meditation; there will be no taming of mind as the fruit of meditation. My gracious editor here asked for a holiday article on meditation, with an actual meditation appended. I will certainly append one, but it will be exactly the meditation I had suggested in my prior column.

There is no need for a Christmas meditation that has jingle bells and dangly ornaments and holly attached to it; there's not any need for an orange-cranberry sauce meditation especially for Thanksgiving; no dreidel and latke meditations for Hannukah; no New Year's Day meditations complete with confetti and noisemakers and lists of resolutions not to mention a free ticket for a midnight trip to Times Square.

There is no need for any special meditation technique to deal with holiday-driven discursive thoughts related to claustrophobia when in the presence of annoying, irritating, pushy, unboundaried, judgmental relatives; no special holiday techniques to deal with automatic discursive thoughts about oppressive financial woes, ongoing irreparable personal inadequacies, physical and/or moral stress, reactions to upsurges in world misery, or recurring vengeful thoughts about Karl Rove and Dick Cheney, not to mention the alarming political situation in Bazheeristanistan, which I won't mention.

A basic kind of shamatha/vipassana meditation is all you need: the big deal about it is actually putting the instructions into practice. If you don't do that, you won't get any results. How could you?

Yes, I'm asserting that this general basic sitting meditation, performed pretty much daily, is all you need to begin with, sort of one-size-fits-all. But why am I saying that? Isn't that nutty? How dare I?

I say that because when it comes to taming the mind, really, you know, there's just mind. The mind of each individual.

Works the same, functions the same – it's just ordinary mind. Zen mind, beginner's mind. No secret. No big deal. Nothing special.



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There isn't a special Thanksgiving mind, or Hannukah mind, or Christmas mind, or New Year's Day mind, or holiday mind. Minds just function the way they function; naked awareness is present in us, always, regardless of the particular content of thought that may arise.

Working with mind entails learning not to follow after thoughts, and slowly, slowly working to make a habit of non-distraction. When we follow after thoughts, we feed them, we believe them, we become lost in their content or seduced by their content, and we lose our presence of mind. Practicing a simple, straightforward kind of meditation helps to train our minds and tame our mind, so we can practice becoming more mindful and less distracted.

Understanding this process, through our own personal individual meditation experience, is what is helpful. Not the season of the year, not the day, not the place, not the content of thought, but the individual experience gained through our own practice, when we are becoming familiar with our own mind and how it works.

As the renowned Tibetan teacher Milarepa pointed out, "When you run after thoughts, you are like a dog chasing a stick. Every time a stick is thrown, you run after it. Instead, be like the lion who, rather than chasing after the stick, turns to face the thrower.

"One only throws a stick at a lion once."

Happy holidays!

Simple Meditation

Sit with back upright. Set kitchen timer (if possible) for 5 or 10 minutes.

Place an object of focus (blue flower?) an ox-yoke length away on floor or table. Focus eyes downward at a 45-degree angle; keep eyes open. Breathe normally. Keep mind on the object of focus.

When your mind strays, which it will, gently, non-judgmentally, bring your attention back to the object of focus, having labeled the thought by saying, "thinking, thinking."

Repeat.

Stop when time is up.

Constance Wilkinson, LMHC, MFA is a licensed psychotherapist who uses a mindfulness-based, solution-focused approach to help reduce symptoms of dysregulation, as well as to develop clients' personal goals and strategies to achieve them. She is trained in EMDR, clinical hypnosis, EFT, and expressive arts.

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