

Communication

Meditation: Awakening the Intuitive and Creative Self

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We don't laugh because we're happy.
We're happy because we laugh.
William James

In the Indian classic scriptures called the Upanishads, a collection of spiritual wisdom, the foundation of existence is outlined in these four verses [1]:

You are what your deep, driving desire is.

As your desire is, so is your will.

As your will is, so is your deed.

As your deed is, so is your destiny.

(Brihadaranyaka IV.4.5).

Desire refers to love, expansion, union, freedom, and joy [2]. The thought is then either in alignment or in resistance to that core desire of the heart. Later and more modern interpretations of the timeless wisdom became something along the lines, "Watch your thoughts; for they become words. Watch your words; for they become actions. Watch your actions; for they become



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habits. Watch your habits; for they become character. Watch your character; for it becomes your destiny.”

In the Buddhist scriptures, an untrained mind is frequently compared to a wild elephant [3]. When its power is untamed, it has a life of its own – thoughts passing without awareness, life lived without awareness. Sadness is a common companion to such a mind.

What is meditation? Much research has been done looking at effects of such a simple yet life-changing practice [4]. From the metaphysical standpoint, the world is just a mirror of a thought one holds inside the mind or consciousness [5]. It is either joyful and happy or ugly and depressing. The practice of meditation is empowering, because it changes one’s and collective worlds. Meditation helps to stay present and gain a momentary opportunity into choosing a thought. In quantum mechanics, this refers to the power of an observer to direct his or her experience and, in a split second, determine which reality he or she is living [6].

There is a story. A father had two sons: one felt a victim of life. He viewed his life through the prism of “My childhood was difficult. My father was an alcoholic. The reason my life is failing is because of that. I was not loved enough.” This is his inner mantra – a cycle of a repetitive thought patterns that he continuously told himself. His life followed that very mantra. He didn’t try and expected to fail, he didn’t have his eyes open to see opportunities. His brother, to everyone’s surprise, was a complete opposite. He traveled the world, learned new languages, met inspiring people, and pursued his dreams. “How did you turn out like that?” – friends asked him. “Because of my father,” – was the answer. The moral of the story is that what you believe in creates the reality you experience. It also influences your choices and actions. That is an apparent way of explaining how beliefs create reality.

Meditation helps to develop a subtle level of awareness connected to energy. Each thought has a particular energetic vibration. Each is associated with different frequency ranging from low to high, like notes of a musical instrument. Joy, benevolence, compassion, love have the highest frequencies. Masaru Emoto [7], a Japanese scientist, carried out a series of experiments to examine the molecular structure of water. In his research, polluted water could be purified after a prolonged exposure to loving thoughts, a prayer, and positive intentions. Thoughts of the lowest frequencies, in contrast, have the opposite effect. Examples of such thoughts include judgment, fear, shame, and guilt [8, 9]. Whether thoughts are self- or other-directed, you can imagine the consequences – depression, anxiety, worry, and stress.

In essence, everyone is a walking vibrational machine. Every thought of yours is of a particular frequency. According to the law of nature, like attracts the like [5]. If you are complaining about life most of the time, people with whom you are likely to hang out are going to be those of a similar mindset. Those who do not wish to waste time on complaining will tend to escape your company.

Nicolas Christakis, a sociologist, applied the theory of networks to examine clustering of happiness and unhappiness [10]. He and his team found that happiness is contagious, so to speak. Those with similar vibrations congregate together, similar to diseases – heart conditions and diabetes. No surprise here, given that more than 99% of health conditions are attributed to stress.

Meditation is not only an act of sitting down on a cushion but a lifestyle of being aware and making choices – about thoughts and actions – to create your, rather than imposed from the outside, reality of life. If you want to experience wealth, health, connection, then choose your thoughts, reality will follow. This lifestyle opens two wonderful gifts: creativity and intuition.

Creativity is ability to come up with original content. It is connected to your child-like desire to explore and experiment. Children are creative by nature. The lifestyle of meditation or awareness is the process of returning to the child-like state of wonder. While there are many kinds of meditation practices [4], the one that inspires you is the right kind, because joy and inspiration is the driving force behind consistency and discipline. Awareness is awareness, and pathways to it are plentiful.

Barriers to creativity include acquired habits of low vibrational frequencies – patterns of fear, judgement, shame, and guilt. A tortured artist is a common concept because of the inner conflict between the natural state of inspiration and acquired thought patterns of self-judgment, comparison, criticism etc. Typical symptoms of this inner imbalance are a writer's block, feelings of anxiety, depression, habits of procrastination, and thoughts related to low self-esteem.

Healing such thought patterns is a delicate process. You need to be a) patient – understand that it takes time, b) immensely loving – connect to your true nature of unconditional love, and c) joyous – find humor and delight in your humanness and the pace at which you change and adapt to this new way of being.

Intuition is your way of knowing without thinking. It is also the one that helps guide you towards practices that are right for you at a given time point. Inspiration and joy are usually good indicators that you are on the right track. Feeling free and empowered from a particular practice is supporting evidence for it right in this moment of your life. Every child is intuitive because a child knows how to feel and not think. Naturally, a child prefers people, environments, and activities that are joyful and loving and avoids those with low vibrational frequency. Every child is unique. He chooses based on his nature.

In psychological sciences, there are two kinds of methods – nomothetic and ideographic. The first refers to making inferences based on group statistics. The latter implies studying an individual. Peter Molenaar, a methodologist and a proponent of the ideographic approach, published a paper called “The Manifesto to psychology as ideographic science: Bringing the person back into scientific psychology, this time forever” [11]. His work demonstrated that group theories do not hold for individuals. In psychology, for instance, the classic five-factor personality inventory, frequently used to derive scores of human traits, such as openness, neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness, does not frequently apply to a particular individual. For instance, one may have only three traits present, while another – all five. Inter-individual differences are substantial.

Trying to be like everyone is the conditioning you go through from childhood to adulthood. In the process, you abandon your nature and start shaping habits, actions, and lifestyles according to comparative thinking - wanting to be like or resisting being like others. Both are ends of the same physical phenomenon known as resistance, which blocks your natural state of creativity.

Imagine a forest spring. By nature, it has shape, size, speed, inlets and outlets. Someone comes to it and says, “Be like that river. I don't like the way you look. You are way too narrow and shallow.” The spring is unsure. After all, it is there to bring joy and pleasure to others. It tries to reshape itself but in the process dries out all tougher. This is an analogy to growing up, and drying out is a metaphor for trying to be someone you are not, and losing joy in the process.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist of 20th century, talked about the concept of flow – an optimal experience when a person is fully absorbed in an activity, so that other things stop to matter [12]. This is how children play. They are completely lost in an activity. “I am tired from

playing too much,” is rarely a complaint of a child. It is an intuitive process, where ideas arise as needed. Give a child a few objects, and shortly there will be a story with characters, rules, challenges and solutions. Growing up, you forget the flexible attitude, giving more priority to rules. A pen becomes a pen versus just an object that can be used for writing, crafts making, gardening, digging holes, supporting a small plant, or being an extension of your arm to press a button you cannot reach.

Consider meditation as an act of play. Meditation deals with things you don't see directly: thoughts, emotions, beliefs, physical sensations. The field known as metaphysics – movement and transformation of energy on the inside, is also a part of psychology – as an ‘art of alchemy.’ Turning lead into gold, only instead of metal, it refers to your personal inner vibration of thought patterns. The main principle holds “What is below is what is above,” meaning the world is a direct reflection of your inner state. A mirror in which you look to learn about yourself. To change your life, change your inner state.

Think of a tree. If it has healthy roots, is well-nourished, has enough light and space, the trunk and the leaves are healthy. To grow a tree like that takes time. You are just like that tree. When you give attention to your inner state and play with transforming one kind of energy – low vibration – into another kind – high vibration, your world starts to change - relationships, work, health, well-being, priorities, choices. Creativity and intuition is your natural state. It is not something you learn. Rather, it is something you remember, since you are born with it. Everyone is born creative, the way it looks may be different. No need to get discouraged if your way is unique.

There are a few things to try, keeping in mind the concept of play as a metaphor for life. Indian scriptures have a beautiful reference to it called “Lila” or divine play. They remind us of creativity, inner potential, a sense of wonder, an approach to life as a journey, in which you are a hero, since the only reality you experience is yours [13].

1. Play

Meditation and life as a metaphor for a mindful journey do not need to be as serious as they have been portrayed over the years. Many practices in the West come from Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism – classic paths of a monk. Yet, many of us live a civic life. Elements of the mindset coming from such traditions, however, can be very useful. They include: a) being while doing, b) relaxing instead of forcing, c) experiencing rather than thinking, d) engaging instead of avoiding actions, e) loving instead of judging, f) accepting instead of resisting, g) collaborating instead of competing, h) relating instead of separating, i) understanding instead of rejecting, j) enjoying instead of being resentful.

Meditation, traditionally, is viewed as a seated and solo exercise. Yet, it can be expanded to include a creative format given the right intention – dance, painting, walking, gardening, cooking, relating, writing, driving, talking. The play format is special in its essence. It is connected to innocence of a child that engages in life as play and learns on the go. It gives a permission to experiment, try, explore, awaken awe and spontaneity, and release attachment to a particular outcome.

Something to say here about human physiology and the fight-or-flight response. In life, you play not against your spouse, a different political party, a neighbor, or a rivaling spiritual tradition

but against yourself. For that reason, it would be much more helpful to remember that we are all in this together and find creative ways of helping each other rather than resent, critique, and judge.

We all get hurt, and there are tools to recover. A phenomenon known as post-traumatic growth [14], for instance, refers to a human innate ability to grow in the process of a challenge. Meditation, mindfulness, and other spiritual practices help to stimulate growth and put challenges into a perspective. Those who choose to go through such a process, find themselves re-evaluating priorities, emphasizing deeper values, and connecting to moment-to-moment experiences, joy, self-expression, and meaningful relationships.

2. Laugh

Indian army, physicians in England, as well as psychologists in the U.S. use the practice of laughing yoga – laughter for no reason. The mechanism is directly connected to the parasympathetic nervous system [15]. Naturally, your body in times of great distress starts to laugh to unload tension and fear, taking in more air, distributing oxygen, releasing muscular contraction, relaxing your digestion and reproductive systems. “A laugh a day keeps a doctor away” – findings from the field of positive psychology.

Children laugh all the time. A personal choice is to laugh before it is funny, to make it funny. This is how you change thoughts, emotions, beliefs, actions, and life experiences. The process of de-conditioning means engaging in play (laughter) before seeing results. Trusting they come with time.

Intuition is your natural ability to feel. Everyone is born intuitive and can learn to strengthen it with practice. Intuition is an inner barometer that keeps you in check. Calibrating your inner system to frequencies of joy and love is a good aspiration for life. It helps to move through challenges more gracefully and make decisions based on what feels good rather than what you think must be good. Further, in the age of the information overload, intuition helps to navigate the ocean of facts and rules. Finally, it helps to understand a deeper meaning of things.

For instance, say, you fell and hurt your knee. The conditioned state of the mind would only see the problem superficially and logically, “How can I reduce this pain?”. The intuitive self, however, sees a deeper meaning behind the hurt knee, “I need to slow down and take care of my body”. In this way, intuition helps to prevent accumulation of stress, promote sustainable health routines, and prevent inter-personal conflicts [16].

To summarize, the mind is a neural network of thought patterns, among other things. The way you think determines whether a pattern is strengthened or weakened. Many things influence the way you think: parents, culture, education, social media, etc. If left unconscious, habits are passed across generations. Such a simple exercise as laughter or laughing meditation can shift a mindset, bring a lighter attitude and inspire a different viewpoint. With training, it helps to access the Intuitive self that can be applied to daily life.

3. Practice

If you want to be creative and intuitive, practice those skills. Like anything else, the skills are strengthened through repetition. “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” Through “practice, practice, and practice.”

Creativity is about using the power of your Creative Self to come up with original solutions. It has less to do with learning, but more with un-learning or un-conditioning, stepping out of the box, so to speak. One of the top complaints of leading tech industries (e.g., Google) about applicants who graduate from top universities is that they are not creative enough [17]. Emphasis on creative and intuitive thinking is one way to overcome this challenge.

Lack of originality is, in part, an artifact of the educational system as well. Both primary and graduate education put a large emphasis on rules and memorization of facts. Facts and rules are the domain of the left-brain hemisphere that is in charge of logical thinking. In Newtonian terms, it deals primarily with the physical world of objects and is known as Materialism, in Marxist philosophy. For running trains on time and delivering goods, it is very handy. For solving deeper societal problems in areas of ecology, geo conflicts, and monetary transactions, for example, -- linear thinking is limited. In that case, the Intuitive and Creative Self is necessary. It is the realm of quantum physics, referring to a non-linear fashion of change, where a small shift in one domain creates a big impact in another.

Einstein, a great exemplar of a scientist with an awakened inner child said, "Education is not learning of facts but the training of minds to think." A talented violin player, he combined keen observation with the naivete of a child, meant not as lack of wisdom, but an absence of judgment and expectations. He let nature inform his discoveries. Another example is Max Born, a pioneer of quantum physics, also an avid music lover.

In music, as in life, reality is quantum. Time and space are relative. Feeling and inspiration are the guiding forces. It enables a multidimensional way of existence connected to the present moment, just as in play and meditation. You create reality now, not tomorrow – the basic law of energy movement. "Fire starts with a spark and ends with a bucket of water." It is your choice, now. Often, classically-trained musicians struggle with jazz, because it requires a different way of approaching music. There is theory, yet there is also improvisation – not the strongest suit of a rule-based classical music training. Similarly, scientists frequently struggle to apply their discoveries to life that is fast paced and deviates from controlled environments.

Fortunately, there has been some progress in the educational system. Some examples involve Montessori and Waldorf schools [18, 19], creative and expressive art therapies [20]. Mindfulness and meditation is more commonly accepted in schools and universities. Creativity, in the modern world, is a path of healing. Given prevalence of stress, mental conditions, and conflicts, healing is necessary on the individual and collective levels. Creativity is one important format of translating discomfort into a mindful and creative change.

Play can be a metaphor for many things. When you play together, you cannot fight with the same fearlessness and conviction. A game of chess with a person you love is a game of fun not a game of survival. A fun way of adopting laughing practices in the army, dance parties in a congress, and painting matches at economic forums could bring about lightness and help to unstuck the mindset that focuses on problems rather than seeing solutions.

I would like to finish with a personal story. In 2014, I was on a ten-day silent meditation retreat in Indonesia. The tradition was rigorous, known as Vipassana, a part of the Theravada Buddhism. It was not my first meditation retreat, and I gave myself a leeway into some flexibility with the rules. I kept a set of crayons and a drawing pad. During hours of silence, images would come up and I would pencil them down later. One of them (Figure 1) is about a human journey, representing hills and valleys, with steps along the path through challenges and uplifting experiences. Awakening of

my Intuitive and Creative Self took time. It unfolded over years and brought understanding that meditation is not only a sitting activity to solve problems and deal with stress and life difficulties but also a way to awaken the Creative, Intuitive, & Joyful Self, eager to be expressed in life.



Figure 1 Path of Life – from the Meditation Retreat in Indonesia, 2014.

Author Contributions

The author completed all the work.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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