

TEISHO: THROUGH THE FLOATING MIST

This practice of sitting meditation may have its roots in Asia particularly Buddhism and Hinduism, but it also has a long history within the Judeo Christian tradition too, though for us it has been largely side-lined. Sages, Mystic's, Yogi's and Zen Masters have been exploring this practice for thousands of years and I along with others of this persuasion believe it has an important message to us here in the West living as we do in a very secular world.

I have always stressed that what we do here on these days is a practice open to anyone. It's not Buddhist- per se,. I always say there is Zen Buddhism and there is Zen. The difference between the 'Art of Zen' and true Zen is that you already have true Zen without trying. It's when you try to capture it, you lose it! I don't know who said that, but it rings so true.

This practice has to do with living in harmony with yourself and the world . It calls us to examine our view of the world of life and our place in it. It's a practice of cultivation of appreciation of our life: It is about 'being in touch'. It's the opposite of taking everything for granted.

It is true that the Japanese art of Zen meditation has cultivated a practice which can be of great help to us. Without any need to buy into everything. There is universal Zen which we can cultivate.

What is Zen? Well, it cannot be taught really, but it can be experienced and sitting being present to your life and to everything around you is a good beginning. The aim of Zen is to bring about a change of consciousness. Or an awakening to our life as it is, and to be present to its mystery.

So, contrary to what some think, this practice of zazen, just sitting, present to your life , present to just what is, does not conflict with any of our deeply held religious beliefs or traditions., or scientific for that matter! Zen isn't trying to sell you anything, especially not a new set of beliefs! It is simply a practical way of getting in touch with yourself and your life. Many people come to meditation because they want to learn to relax, to de-stress etc. These are all good reasons to meditate. However, they are fraught with dangers. Firstly you will expect them to happen and if they don't your will get discouraged. You will be 'looking ' for that experience of being relaxed, of inner peace, and it won't necessarily be there. In Zen practice the best way to get anywhere is to let go of trying to get anywhere. Being with just what is is the essence of this practice. Because trying to deny that things are as they are is mad! It's how we approach what is that matters.

When we sit, we invite just what is to show up. We kind of acknowledge all the things that show up in our minds. The important thing is just to let them. A lot of people think you have to be able to blot them out! You will never be able to do that. If you try there will be a battle!

We have to remember that this practice is a way of life. It isn't just another thing you do, like golf. It's a way of being, a way of life. This practice is an invitation to change the way you live and move in a world that is increasingly going mad! It is a journey of awakening. That's what they mean by enlightenment I think. To be awake. The Buddha was the Awakened one. That's what Buddha means. Meditation or sitting zazen is a journey of awakening. It is a journey hidden within the visible journey of our life. We sit as Christians discovering the ultimate dimension that dwells within each of us. That centre we call the Spirit.

So when we sit in this way, it is a deep encounter with our humanity. We touch what is truly good, beautiful and enlightening within us.

We drop in on ourselves with deep listening, touching what is hidden within us..

We must not forget that awakening is not 'achieved' as such, it is a gift, but we must prepare the ground, so to speak. Learn to sit, to breath, to be still.

In zazen we are just present without shutting anything out. We invite everything but we just watch and sit. We don't engage in conversation with our problems and worries, but we know they are there.. One teacher said she says to herself when something worrying comes to her mind, 'This too' is invited into the field of awareness

Awareness can hold everything. Things as they are. So we sit. Present to what is, moment by moment.

When we practice meditation we are acknowledging that we are on the road of life. The path unfolds in this moment and in everything that is our life. Seen in this way, meditation is a Way of life, not a technique for coping. It's a Way of being, a Way of living, a Way of listening and a Way of walking along the path of life.. It means that there will be times when we have no idea where the path of life is taking us. Just keep to the practice.

Try setting aside time each day for just being. Five, ten twenty minutes, whatever you feel able to do. After a while you might be able to sit for half an hour or more!

Sit with dignity and presence, back straight feet on the floor, hands placed in a meaningful but comfortable position Our posture speaks to our mind. Remember to use the breath as an anchor when you r thoughts carry you away, just come back to the gentle rhythm of your breathing. You can also use a word or phrase from Scripture such as be still or Love, Peace, Abba, or a phrase like God is Love. Or just a sound. But above all keep your attention on your breathing, which is your life!

Sit in the stillness with simple attention on the eb and flow of your breath. This is the essence of zazen sitting meditation.

Remember that more important is a life of compassion and peace. This is true practice.

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