

Beyond Mindfulness: Western Meditation Techniques in Theory and Practice

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First Half: General Theory, and Basic Techniques

- Framing and context.
 - Our goal: discussing possibilities, presenting options (not The One True Way™).
 - ✦ *Fresh air: The cleansing breath.*
 - The term “meditation”: History and usage.
- Some basic working assumptions:
 - Theory: Choice (*prohairesis*) and agency.
 - Technique: Registering the mind.
 - ✦ *Activity: Backtracking.*
- Daily Recollection.
 - Rewind your day, from the present moment backwards.
 - Emphasize observation, and awareness of patterns (not browbeating or self-flagellation).
- Pre-Meditation.
 - Vividly imagine a possible event (positive & negative, on different days).
 - Then ask:
 - What (if any) part of this is up to me?
 - How does this involve or affect my power of choice?
 - Which of my beliefs or judgements are making the situation seem more (un)pleasant?
 - What choices can I make, with regard to how to respond?
 - Vividly imagine yourself doing what is in your power, to respond in the best possible way.

Guide me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny,
To wheresoever you have assigned me;
I'll follow unwavering, or if my will fails,
Base though I be, I'll follow nonetheless.

– Cleanthes, *Hymn to Zeus*
(trans. Robin Hard)

Second Half: “Unfolding a Theme” through Discursive Meditation

- What is a theme?
 - Meaning and etymology.
 - How did the theme get folded?
- Selecting a theme.
 - Sources:
 - From a text, chapter-by-chapter.
 - Philosophy, myth, scripture, sacred texts (broadly construed).
 - Artwork, symbolism.
 - Conceptual schemes.
 - Geometry, architecture, etc.
 - Features to look for:
 - Bite-sized, yet rich.
 - Broadening our intellect, expanding our horizons.
 - What has stood the test of time?
- How to unfold the theme:
 - Start: Call the theme to mind.
 - Method 1: Connections & questions.
 - Method 2: A standard template.
 - The “W questions.”
 - Aristotle’s categories; expansions by Bruno, Lull, many others.
 - Ecological principles, etc.
 - Always keep a golden thread, that connects back to the theme.
 - When (not if!) you wander or jump away: Rewind!
 - When (not if!) you get stuck, or run out of gas: Rewind, find a fork in the path, take it.
- The full structure:
 0. Choose a theme. (Optional: Read/review it before bed, the night before.)
 1. The opening act (prayer/ritual).
 2. Posture.
 3. Relaxation.
 - ✦ *Introductory practice: Noticing tension.*
 4. The four-fold breath.
 - ✦ *Introductory practice: Breathing fully.*
 5. Inner discourse on the theme.
 6. Journalling.
 7. The closing act (prayer/ritual).
- Questions, concerns, considerations?
- The work will teach you how to do it.