

Beyond Mindfulness: Western Meditation Techniques in Theory and Practice

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General Theory & Concepts

- Vocabulary:
 - Meditation and contemplation.
 - Greek *theōria* and its cognates.
 - Latin *speculare* and its cognates.
 - Registering the mind.
- Why go “beyond mindfulness”?
 - Concerns from within Buddhism:
 - Balance and appropriate context.
 - Spiritual bypassing.
 - Concerns from contemporary researchers:
 - Dissociation.
 - The historic context of “no-self.”
 - Western traditions and our historical moment:
 - Manipulation, “nudging,” etc.
 - Active agency within a larger cosmos.
- Some working assumptions:
 - Agency (vs. being a patient).
 - Activity (vs. passivity).
 - Choice (vs. necessity).
 - Cosmos (vs. chaos).
 - Larger than ourselves (vs. “create your own reality”).

Preliminaries & Modular Tools

- The Cleansing Breath.
- Rhythmic Breathing. The “Four-fold Breath.”
- Backtracking.

Focal Points

- Pythagorean Daily Recollection.
 - Rewind your day, from the present moment backwards.
 - Emphasize observation, and awareness of patterns (not browbeating or self-flagellation).
- Stoic 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 judgments 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.
- Some Platonic Gymnastics.
 - Basic Questions:
 - “If x is the case, what else would have to be the case?”
 - AND “If x is not the case, what else would have to be the case?”
 - Begin by defining your terms.
 - Note the direction of explanation:
 - Upstream? Downstream? Side-by-side?
 - A more complex set of questions:
 - If x is simple, what else would have to be the case?
 - If x is composite (made of many parts), what else would have to be the case?
 - If x is not, what else would have to be the case?

A “Full-on” Structure

1. An opening prayer/ritual.
2. Posture and relaxation.
3. Breathing.
4. The main event/focal point.
5. Space for contemplation.
6. Journalling.
7. A closing prayer/ritual.