



### **A Meditation on Meditation**

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Meditation is quality control in the manner of a chef's cooking techniques – consistently practiced, it allows a constant quality of “dishes.” It's the psychological equivalent of a ballet dancer rehearsing movements on the barre or a tennis player volleying before a match to hone the timing and rhythm of her hand-eye coordination. In short, meditation is a daily best practice – a warm-up for self-awareness and self-discipline, leading eventually to being present in an emotionally intelligent manner.

We drop anchor in the present moment by slowing and deepening our breathing. It's about finding the balance between your self that experiences and your self that observes, or, on a neurophysiological level, the balance between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Or about finding the balance between the intelligence that lives in your brain and the intelligence that lives distributed throughout your body (psychotherapists often ask patients: “If your stomach could speak right now what tale might it tell?”).

This presence can help us discover the truth in our intuition, distilled from thoughtful investigations into what we learn from trial and error. Without the best practice of presence born of meditation, the unconscious intuitive false alarms of a traumatized brain are easily tripped by unreliable and invalid innocuous stimuli – our intuition accumulates flaws and may be as random and unpredictable as the fluctuations of the stock market. Presence stretches our knowledge by recognizing and making sense of sometimes minute anomalies in patterned behaviors.

Meditation and presence open us up psychologically so that we can breathe new life into old ideas. Artists and athletes talk about this space as “flow” or being “in the zone.” We know that the tragic flaw of the traumatized brain is that it is seldom if ever “cool under pressure.” But awareness of these trauma-modulated pendulum-like swings between the past and the future may indicate a need for some self-analysis before we return to the challenges of our day.

Practicing meditation can be as easy or as difficult as your level of resistance to being with yourself. For example, when starting a workout program, you can convince yourself that to begin

exercising you need the right outfit, the right gym, the right trainer, the right comfort looking in the mirror etc. This lack of self-comfort is a major barrier to entry into the world of training the body. The lack of self-comfort can make it difficult to be truly present in your self and so raises a similar barrier into the world of training the mind. Maybe you decide that you can't start meditating until you research the most effective technique, pick a mantra, and design a space in which you can sit quietly for 30 minutes each day.

Instead, start simple. Try using deep breathing to anchor yourself in your body while washing dishes. Harvard University's Dr. Herbert Benson, a father of western meditation, suggests that being present is (somewhat simply) learning to attend to your sensory experiences as anchors. Spiritual teacher, Eckert Tolle, sees presence as the moment you are aware that your mind has been on an excursion elsewhere. You can create this presence while walking down the street by deepening your breathing and paying attention to the sensory experiences of your footfalls.

Imagine a degree of separation between your experiential and observing self. Imagine the bounded space created by your present mind. Imagine new possibilities for being with yourself and your loved ones.