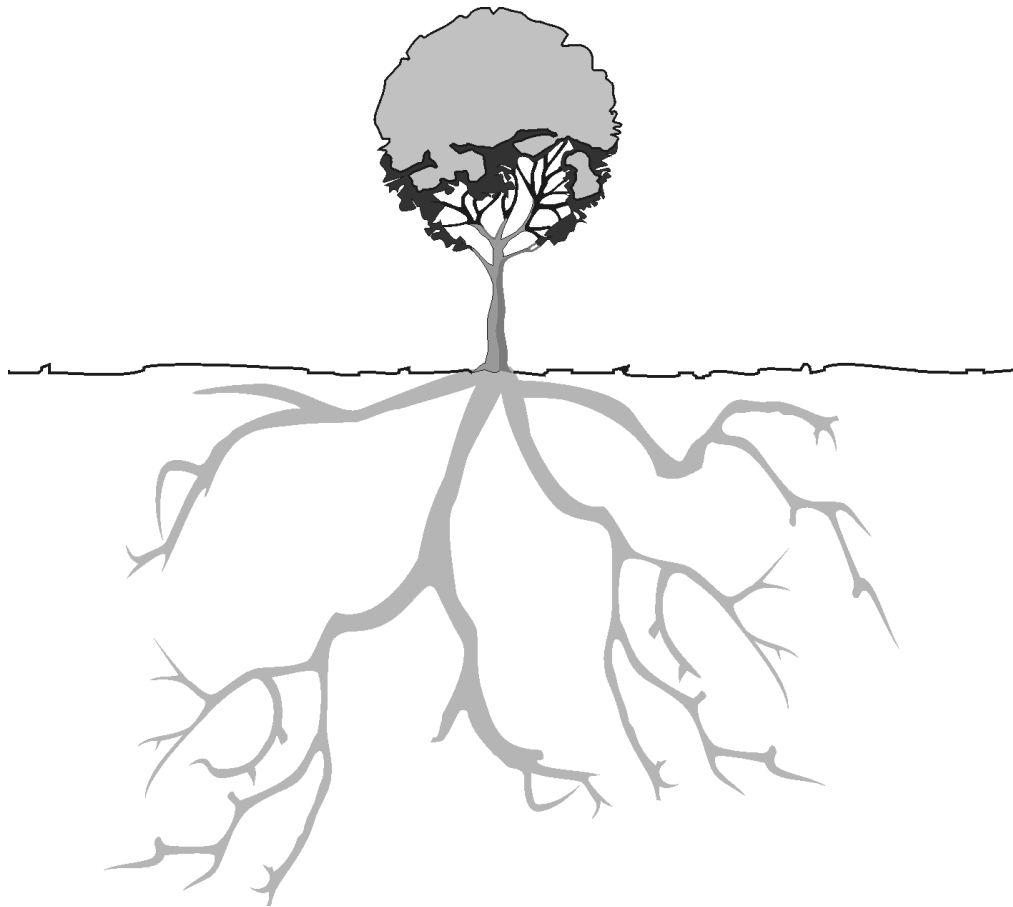


A Simple Primer On Meditation



By Will A

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Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

When I had about a year in AA, I had two pretty momentous things happen to me - I moved into downtown Annapolis, MD and I was hospitalized for a bipolar episode (they called it Manic-Depression back then). The Doctors required that I go on Lithium Carbonate medication and I got to know my next door neighbor. A year later, these two seemingly disparate events came together in a truly astonishing way.

My next door neighbor, Kit, had been meditating for several years and had convinced me to learn (with some amorous feelings for her being more motivating for me than any awareness of the 11th Step). Two weeks later in my four block walk to a meeting at the Red House, I noticed that my legs had become too weak to go the distance. Frightened, I called the Doctor who told me I was having a toxic reaction the Lithium and had to go off it immediately. Frightened even more, I complied. The semi-paralysis left in a week or so. That was in March, 1976. I have meditated at least once a day since then and I have not had a bipolar episode since then. It is very much like now that you're doing that (meditation), you don't have to do that (take Lithium Carbonate) anymore.

It's an honest program. I learned to meditate because I did not want to go crazy again and because I had romantic thoughts about my next door neighbor, not because of the 11th Step and some overall spiritual aspect of the program. We hear that this disease is cunning, baffling, and powerful; well, so is the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Even though I started for other than spiritual reasons, the meditation still began to work to the extent that now the combination of AA and Meditation has become the most powerful and the most positive spiritual force in my life. And, the result has been a deepening spiritual consciousness that I don't think could have happened for me any other way.

Some years later, I left the engineering profession and became an organizational trainer. On my own, I began teaching classes in meditation mostly for AA folks and I wrote this meditation booklet to accompany them. The first version was generic; more recently, I rewrote it into this AA version.

As part of my own way of giving it away in order keep it, I give any member of any 12-Step program permission to copy and distribute this booklet for any other 12-Step program or member. I have copyrighted it to protect it, but that permission is freely and legally mine to give and I do so gratefully.

The Other Benefits of Meditation

Meditation effects us in many different ways, all of them down-to-earth and practical. In addition to the primary one covered by Step Eleven, the ones I think are the most important are:

- ❖ Health Benefits
- ❖ Deeper Sense of Yourself
- ❖ Increased Consciousness
- ❖ Spiritual Growth

Let's consider each one.

Health Benefits

The health benefits of meditation are numerous and of immense value. Just search the Web under "Meditation Health Benefits" and you will see research papers on Meditation's health benefits listed with a number of respected medical journals and institutions. Slowing of biological aging, lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, anger and depression, enhanced immune response, and reduced insulin resistance are all among the benefits cited.

Deeper Sense of Yourself

Meditation puts you in touch with your thoughts and natural rhythms at a deeper level, including that somewhat mysterious, non-analytical part of you, your intuition.

Increased Consciousness

Meditation not only increases your awareness of yourself, but also of everything around you! Meditation increases your ability to relate to others, to stay focused, to be more aware of everything within and around you, and to appreciate the interconnectedness of things as well as increases your understanding of how things work in many cases.

Spiritual Growth

Notice we put this one last. Many people shy away from Meditation because of fear it may conflict with their religious (or non-religious) ideas. In fact, spiritual growth is only one aspect of Meditation, and even there it is applicable to any kind of belief systems from prevalent religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam up to and including a belief in the potential for good of the human community.

Some Suggestions On Reading This Primer in a Different Way

Different parts of us read in different ways - mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

When we read mentally, we are concentrating on learning and retaining the information contained in the words. Depending on the complexity, most of us feel we have learned what we have read after reading it just a few times. Seldom, do we read the same words again once we have learned the lesson.

When we read emotionally, we are relating what we read to our emotional life - to memories, shared insights and feelings evoked by what we read. Sometimes we are saddened, sometimes we resist what the words are saying, sometimes we experience pleasure and enjoyment. Often, after a period of time, we can read the passage again and re-experience the same emotions.

When we read spiritually, the words take on a greater meaning that has a timeless quality. And, this meaning can change as we grow and change. The words themselves are not precise because of their limitations in describing spiritual matters. They paint pictures of something larger than they are, than we are. Spiritual passages are meant to be read over and over again. Our mind may grow tired of them, but, because of their link to Spirit, our souls continually relate to them.

This primer on meditation is meant to be read all three ways. It has mental, emotional and spiritual content. For those just starting to meditate as well as those wishing to renew their meditation practice, we suggest that you read this primer in its entirety once a day just before one of your meditations for two weeks. Even though your mind may think it knows it all after a day or two, you will still be "learning" how to meditate emotionally and spiritually. After the two weeks, keep the primer near where you meditate and reread the most meaningful passages from time to time just before you meditate. It will help you to make your meditations a regular practice that can then become a gentle and profound way of transforming every aspect of your life.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is simple, easy and natural. Most people have been meditating in some way all their lives! It's like exercising. Most people have been walking all their lives too. But, they can still be out of shape if they don't walk often and regularly. The same is true with meditation. And, if you meditate regularly, it can lead to a much healthier life. What exercise does for your body effects your whole sense of well-being. What meditation does for mind and emotions effects your spirit as well as your well-being.

The mind is naturally active. Sitting in a chair, you can find yourself thinking about anything - the phone call you just received, going to lunch, the next task you have, someone special in your life. There is nothing wrong with this bubbly quality of the mind. It is its nature.

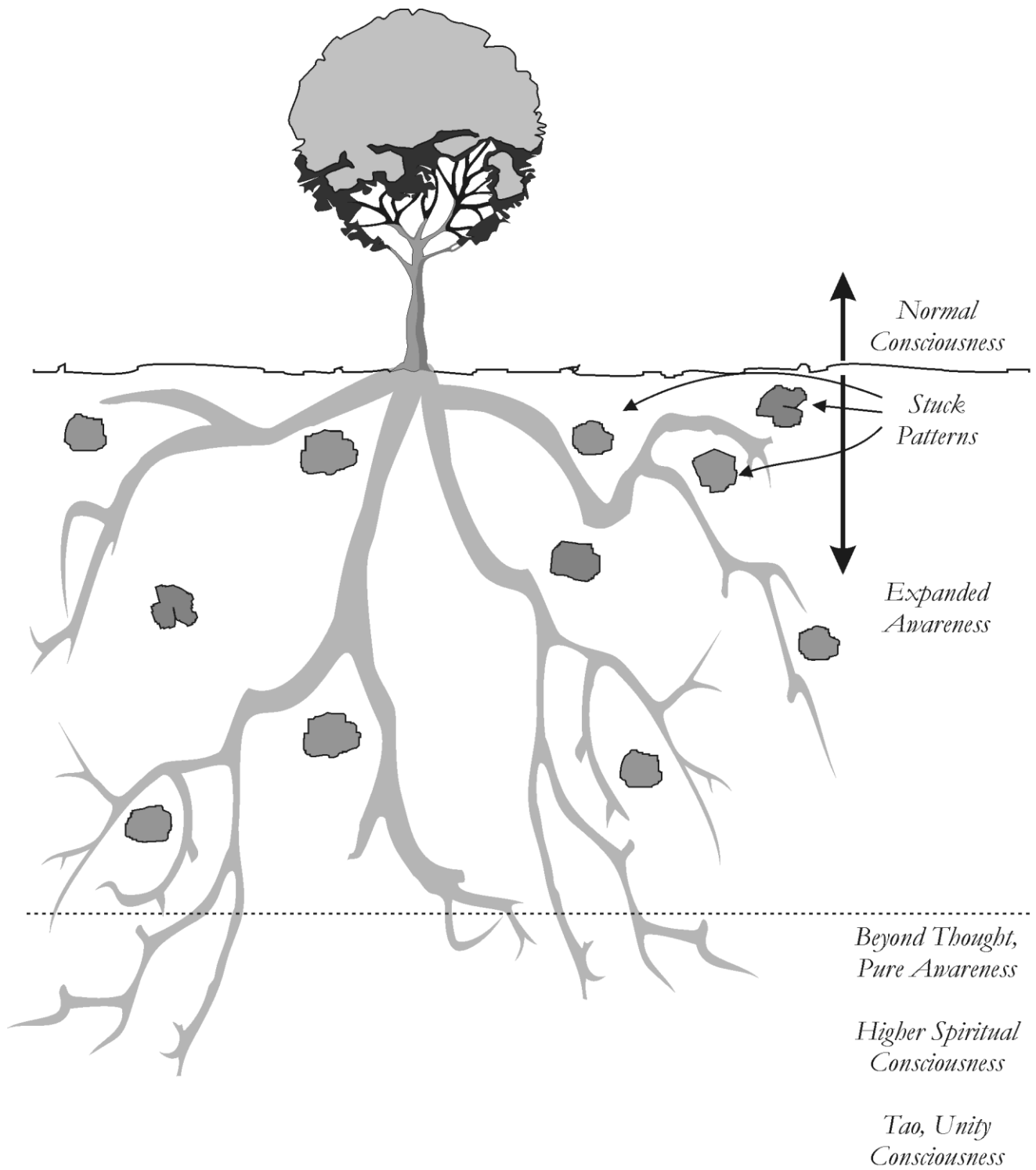
The meditation technique taught here gives your mind something else to think about while you're meditating. It is called a mantra. You choose your own mantra. It may or may not have a special meaning to you. Even though you repeat it mentally, it does have a quality of sound that helps the mind align itself with more natural rhythms deeper in your awareness. When the mind does this, it expands its awareness. Sometimes, the mind can even transcend thought and move into a state of pure awareness. This is your being at its essence. We do not try to be quiet. We do not try not to think. We do not try to do *anything* in meditation. It is not a contest. Just as we condition the body with exercise, we condition the mind with meditation.

Think of a tree and the roots that support it shown on the page that follows. The roots are usually much bigger than the tree itself. The tree's life depends on having healthy roots, yet this is the part we do not see. The tree above the ground represents our normal consciousness, what we are normally aware of; its roots represent that part of our mind we are not conscious of yet.

With meditation, you explore and expand your awareness of this deeper part of your mind. Not like mental concentration or therapy; but like pure water flows until it becomes clear after a storm. As your mind begins to expand its consciousness, it may encounter stuck patterns of thinking or stored trauma. When this happens, thoughts can arise. This is normal and a sign that your meditation is working. It is gently washing away these negative patterns a little at a time until your consciousness becomes clear.

Sometimes you think thoughts, sometimes you don't. It is all meditation and it is all good. And, when you become aware you are not thinking your mantra, you just easily come back to it. It's simple, easy and natural. You are not trying to do anything. You're just being in a special, deeper way. This is meditation.

Levels of Consciousness



The Most Basic Meditation

As we said at the beginning, the meditation technique we teach on the next two pages uses a sound called a Mantra. However, you carry with you the most basic sound of all, your breathing. It also is a good way to start meditating.

There are a couple of difficulties most people have about learning to meditate. First, we are not used to it, so it takes practice. Learning how to meditate is a lot like starting an exercise program when you are out of shape. You don't go out and run a marathon when you first start; you take smaller steps instead until you have built up your body. Second, meditating is about awareness, not thinking. But, our mind wants to think! That's its nature. And, when we *try* not to think, it just gets worse. Our mind will be filled with thoughts about not thinking! The Practice below is designed to move past both of these difficulties and help us practice detaching from our thoughts. It will help you to meditate on a regular basis.

PRACTICE

Find a place to sit quietly. Turn off the TV or the radio; if you can't, find a separate room where you can close the door and minimize the sound. Make sure there is nothing you have to do or take care of for the next 20 minutes. This is your quiet time and you deserve it.

Now, close your eyes and let yourself be aware of your surroundings – sounds, smells, other sensations that are part of your physical environment. Just be aware of them. If you have any thoughts about them, just let the thoughts go and be aware of the sensations. Now, let your awareness go to your body – how the chair feels, how you are sitting, any other sensations that your body is feeling. Just be aware of them. If you have any thoughts about them, just let the thoughts go and be aware of how your body is feeling. Don't try to not think; just be aware of the thoughts and then let them go easily.

Finally, let your awareness go to your breathing. Don't think about it; just be aware of it. Don't worry if it is fast or slow, deep or shallow; just be aware of it. If you have a thought about your breathing or anything else, when you become aware that you are not focused on your breathing, just let the thought go and return your awareness to your breathing. Watch your breathing as it goes in and then goes out again. Notice the pause between your breaths. You are like a silent observer who is just watching; no judgment, nothing right or wrong, just watching. Don't worry if thoughts come; it's the mind's nature. Don't try to not think; just return to observing your breathing when you become aware of thoughts. Continue this for 20 minutes. When you're finished, let your mind think whatever it wants to think and give yourself a couple of minutes of regular thinking before opening your eyes.

This exercise is very relaxing and will help you condition your mind into meditating regularly (similar to how you condition your body when you exercise as we said). Exactly what will happen depends on a lot of different things, so it's not predictable. For most people, their minds will sometimes move towards a quality of more awareness and less thinking in the latter part of the exercise. Sometimes, they will move into a place where there is hardly any thinking at all. In either case, they are practicing meditating as well as giving themselves a powerful way to relax before going on to the next task.

This is one form of meditation. Another, using a sound called a Mantra, is described in the pages that follow. Use either one to start meditating on a regular basis.

Choosing A Mantra

There's nothing mysterious about the mantra itself. It is simply a word used in meditation in place of your other thoughts. The word you use may have some special meaning to you, but it is the meaning that is special, not the word. The mantra does have a special quality of sound, that when repeated mentally, helps your mind to align itself with its deeper rhythms within. The special qualities of the mantra are that it has two distinct parts or syllables and it consists of some m and/or n sounds.

While the mantra itself is merely a word with these qualities that you use instead of your usual thoughts, what happens to the mind when you meditate is both mysterious and wonderful. After a period of time, your mind-body system quietens. Scientific studies show that 20 minutes of meditation can be the equivalent of two hours sleep. Other studies show that blood pressure decreases markedly and with regular meditation stays down. Breathing slows. Yet, at the subjective level of your own awareness, you may not even be aware of these changes.

For this reason, you do not try to do anything while meditating. Remember, it is important that you let go and be with whatever comes up at the time. Do not try to achieve a certain state; it will all happen naturally. The more naturally you come into these states of higher consciousness, the better the whole experience will be for you. Just follow the meditation instructions on repeating the mantra and let everything that follows happen naturally. Here are some words that can be used as mantras. Pick the one you like the most. If you have a special one you want to use, make it one with two distinct parts and an m or n sound.

<u>Mantra</u>	<u>Pronunciation</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Om	Aahh - ummmm	Sanskrit word for God
Amen	Aaahh - mennn	"And so it is"
I am	Eyye - aaamm	"Be still and know that <i>I am</i> God"
So Ham/ Ham So	Sooo - Haamm Haamm - Sooo	I am that That I am

When you meditate, using the mantra is the way you invite your mind to align itself with its natural rhythms; a deeper, more expanded sense of yourself. When that alignment occurs, the mantra repeats itself easily, naturally. Sometimes, it becomes a faint impulse only vaguely resembling the original sound. When this occurs, simply let go and let it happen.

How to Meditate

Meditation is simple, easy and natural. The reasons why we repeat those words are because they are so totally true and because the mind is usually not used to things of profound importance being simple, easy or natural. As you read these words, let your mind relax, let the focus of your eyes soften; move to a quieter place where there are not many distractions. Then just read the words, let them in without analyzing them. When you feel ready, use these words as a simple step-by-step process to guide you in your meditation.

Preparing

Find a place to sit comfortably. You should sit up with your back relatively straight; you may or may not need some back support. When you first start meditating, it will help if you can find a quiet place with soft lights and no distractions. Later, you will find you can meditate almost anywhere if the circumstances call for it.

Starting

To start your meditation, close your eyes, take a deep breath and just sit quietly for about 30 seconds. Do not repeat your mantra. Just sit quietly and allow yourself to settle in. Let yourself get used to the thoughts and sensations within you and the sounds around you. Don't do anything. This is very important.

Meditating

After 30 seconds of sitting quietly, begin mentally repeating the mantra. Do not repeat the mantra earnestly; just softly. Let it come to you. Often, the mantra will begin to repeat by itself. If it doesn't, just easily repeat it. If it does, let it happen. Do not worry about whether it is fast or slow, loud or soft, clear or indistinct. The mantra can become a faint impulse, more of a rhythm than a mental sound. That's fine, just let go and listen to this deeper part of you. Often, thoughts will come that are not the mantra. This is fine. It means the mind is working according to its nature. At some point, you will become aware of the thought, "I am not thinking the mantra." When that happens, just easily, softly let your mind return to the mantra. Do not *try* to meditate; do not *try* to be still; if something itches, scratch it. Do not *try* to do anything! You are meditating correctly if you are not trying to do anything. Just follow these simple instructions easily and let go to whatever happens. Continue to meditate for 20 minutes. Don't worry about the time; let your mind tell you when the time is up. If it's early, just close your eyes again and meditate until the time is up. If it's 20 minutes or more, just relax and allow yourself to come out.

Coming Out

This is very important. Do not open your eyes or get up immediately after you finish meditating. Your body is in a very relaxed state and your metabolism can be as low as when you are in a deep sleep. Allow a minimum of two minutes, five is better, to just sit quietly without repeating the mantra, and let your body and mind return to normal consciousness. Do not forget this. This time is as important as the meditation itself.

Some Meditation Guidelines

Where Do You Meditate?

Meditation is not hard but it is delicate. This is especially true when you first start meditating. Pick a quiet place where you won't be interrupted or distracted. The bedroom with the door closed is one of the most often used places. Let people know you will not be available for the next 25 minutes or so.

When Do You Meditate?

We meditate twice a day for 20 minutes each time. It is best to meditate before meals. Just after a meal, there is a lot of activity in the stomach that can be distracting. Avoid meditating just before bedtime. Meditation can make it difficult for some people to go to sleep. Most people meditate in the morning just before breakfast and in the evening just before dinner.

How Long Do You Meditate?

We meditate for 20 minutes. A lot of people have experimented with meditation and 20 minutes seems to be the optimum time. And, it's very important that you stay with this same time interval. Your mind and inner self learn to trust its constancy, and your meditation experience deepens spontaneously.

How Often Do You Meditate?

Once a day is beneficial but twice a day is better; experienced meditators find that two times a day is much more powerful than one, considerably more than twice as much. Meditating twice a day helps your mind to become accustomed to this type of expanded awareness and to bring it into your normal waking consciousness much more quickly.

Sounds and Sensations

Treat sounds and sensations just like thoughts. If you become aware of a sound, that's fine. If it means something is really important and needs immediate attention, take care of it and then return to meditating. Much more often however, whatever is happening can wait 10 or 20 minutes. Just return to the mantra and continue to meditate.

Strong Internal Thoughts and Sensations

Occasionally, a thought or sensation is so strong that you cannot continue saying the mantra easily. When this happens, simply let your mind go to that thought or sensation until it loses its intensity and then return easily to the mantra.

When You Feel Bliss

Sometimes you will become aware of a feeling of bliss while meditating. This is fine. Scientific studies show that this feeling is strongly correlated with a higher level of mental functioning. Simply enjoy the bliss and stay with the mantra.

Signs of Higher Consciousness

Meditation is a unique experience for everyone. You open the gates to a deeper sense of being, of consciousness. What happens then is a very individual experience. Even so, there are some signs of how your expanding consciousness effects your everyday life that are common to everyone.

- ⌘ Increased mental clarity; better memory
- ⌘ Emotional stability; can detach with love
- ⌘ Stronger intuition; increased creativity
- ⌘ Witnessing; silent observer
- ⌘ Spontaneous right action
- ⌘ Continuous sense of a Higher Power; the Tao

There is a story about how people used to dye cloth in ancient times. To produce a deep maroon color, people would first boil a pot of water containing purple wild berries. Then they would dip the cloth into the pot for a while. When they pulled it out, it was a deep, rich maroon color. When they put the cloth into the sun to dry, the sun would bleach out most of the color until only a faint purple tint remained. Then, they would dip it into the pot again, bring it out and dry it in the sun a second time. This time a little more of the color remained. They would continue this process until the cloth became a deep rich purple color that remained fast while in the shining sun.

So it is with meditation. We do not meditate to experience what happens in meditation. We meditate to condition the mind, each time putting a little more of the color of higher consciousness into our awareness. The meditation can be quiet or noisy, calming or energizing. It simply doesn't matter. If you have followed these simple instructions, you have meditated correctly. It is all good.

After each time we meditate, we take the pure consciousness we experience into the sunlight of activity. Even though our mind seems to be as active as always, a small amount of a deeper consciousness stays with us each time we come out of our meditation. As we continue this process, our mind gradually takes on the "color" of a deeper awareness. As our awareness deepens, our regular meditation stabilizes it in the sunlight of activity, and we begin to live differently. The signs of higher consciousness become our normal way of life.

The Gift

You have been given the gift of meditation. It is an unconditional gift. I give it because I need to give it. You will have the opportunity to give gifts of your own to others. This is the way you repay this gift. You do not repay me.

This gift did not cost what it costs to go to college. You can spend \$50,000 to \$150,000 and four years of hard work to acquire a degree. This gift is not like raising a child. You can spend a whole lot more to do that. It is not like giving yourself a long vacation. That too can cost a considerable amount of money and time.

The problem with a gift that costs little money and little time is that we can think it is not valuable. This can be an enormous mistake. Even though the gift of meditation costs you little to learn and only 20 minutes twice a day to practice, it is more valuable than all of these things that cost so much more in time and money.

There is something powerful and wonderful in that if we simply meditate 20 minutes twice a day, we will grow in how we are as human and spiritual beings. Our minds will become clearer, our hearts more joyful, and we will experience a oneness with the Power of the Universe, whatever we conceive that to be.

So please believe me when I say there is nothing stronger, more valuable, more flowing in riches than to have a mind that is one with your brothers and sisters and with that Universal Force. Over time, regular meditation will bring you to this remarkable place. Then you will know that, though it costs little, meditation is one of the most valuable gifts you can receive.

Spirit be with you,



Will A



New Life Training & Development
3621 7th Avenue, Edgewater, MD 21037
240.418-1456 day/eve
spirit.will@gmail.com, www.nltd.org