

The Essentials of Embodied Meditation by Russell Delman

The disciples were involved in a heated discussion on the cause of human suffering. Some said it came from selfishness. Others, from delusion. Yet others, from the inability to distinguish the real from the unreal.

*When the Master was consulted, he said,
"All suffering comes from a person's inability to sit still, be alone and listen".
(Based on a story from Anthony de Mello)*

What does it mean to sit "still" and to be "alone" and "listen"?

"Still" does not mean without thoughts, sensations or feelings. "Still" means not running away from what appears.

"Alone" does not mean to withdraw into isolation, rather that we stop blaming anyone for anything- we are finally mature enough to be responsible for our life, our mind, our world.

In an ironic twist, because we are responsible for All, we are not separate from others and therefore never really alone. This is the esoteric meaning of ALL-ONE.

"To listen" means that we bring interested curiosity to the moment inviting intimacy with what comes. Think of an animal in the wild or a person- you- when giving full attention to something or someone that you love- still, alone and listening.

I was asked recently to give a short description of "Embodied Meditation" as we practice it in our programs. The questioner said, "I know many forms of meditation, tell me what do you emphasize". My answer went something like this:

Although I am a meditation teacher I don't actually like the term 'meditation'. Most people hear this word and think that they need to stop their mind, as if the mind is the enemy. Meditation is approached as an intensive form of mind control. I remember years of Zen training in which my inner life was a war between my thoughts and my desire to be free from thoughts: it was the antithesis of peace and awareness.

Rather than 'meditation' I speak about 'just sitting'. 'Just sitting' emphasizes the physical act of sitting with the sensations of weight, breath and other bodily phenomena including sound. Rather than focusing on control, we emphasize "being with 'what is' from moment to moment". This 'being with' embraces whatever arises with respect, warmth and interest. Note that this embracing does not imply 'liking' or enjoying, it is the courageous act of opening one's interest to the pleasant and unpleasant alike.

So we see two main points: 1) a subtle, gentle intention to notice what appears (thoughts, feelings, sensations, images) and 2) a warm-hearted acceptance of whatever one notices. For many students the most important initial learning is to recognize their unfriendly, often cruel habits of self-judgment. Many people are ashamed of their own minds. When we become kinder to ourselves, the whole world changes. IMAGINE SAYING "HELLO" TO EACH moment WITH A WELCOMING, non-condemning SPIRIT. To be friendly with your mind in this way WILL ABSOLUTELY CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

The job of the sitter is to gently and consistently return to the moment, allowing the bodily sensations "to ground" the mind. Through this dedicated intention one is inviting effortless awareness to dawn. Attention and awareness are not the same- the first can lead to the second. While attention includes an intentional guiding of the mind, awareness is spontaneous and free. Interestingly, as awareness dawns the sense of a "body" drops away and all that remains is awareness itself. Embodied meditation leads us beyond embodiment. This is our direction.

A STUDENT OF MINE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM AFRICA AND COMMENTED THAT ALL THE WILD ANIMALS HAD THE SAME BODILY QUALITY OF EFFORTLESS, LIGHT MOVEMENT WITH CONSTANT ALERTNESS, it reminded him of our Embodied Life study. IN OUR PRACTICE WE CALL THIS "RELAXED VITALITY".

Still, alone and listening. THIS TOO IS OUR DIRECTION.