

MEDITATION AS EDUCATION

Imagine school cultivating, not filling, your mind—with stress relief benefits along the way

Antonio Castillo

As students, we seldom realize how critical the contents of the mind are in shaping our lives. We often spend a lot of time involved in activities that clutter, rather than bring clarity, to our thinking processes. The university setting is an attempt to cultivate the mind. It is collectively acknowledged that by refining our mind we become better suited to make a meaningful contribution to the world. Is refining our minds simply the acquisition of information?

A different view of education might look at information as an ornament or a tool to enhance our contribution. But just as a tool can be used skillfully to perform a given task, the same tool can also be misused to create more problems. We all know many intelligent people who are loaded with information but seem to be a burden to those around them. Ideally we would use the information we acquire to help those around us flourish.

Professor Alex Filipenko, a renowned astronomer on the UC Berkeley campus, recently said that if you take the universe from its inception up till now, and compare that to a span of twenty-four hours, the human being has only been in existence for a mere two seconds. This provides a window for a very promising and gentle view of human nature. Humanity is yet in its infancy, and it may take us a while before we can learn to use the tools we develop in the most efficient manner possible. Yet it is a testament of the true nature of human beings that even amidst our consumer culture and its endless distractions, sensations, and activities, we still have an overwhelming need to feel something genuine.

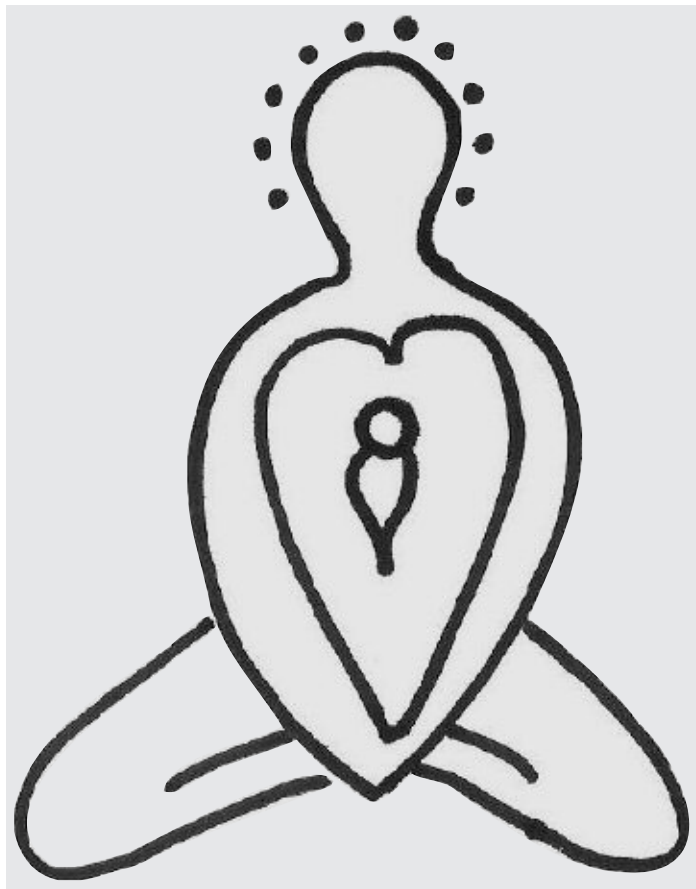
Although we are constantly encouraged to compete with one another and look out for our own well-being, we all recognize and admire those who have risen above the pursuit of recognition and have given themselves wholeheartedly to their fellow human beings. In our era, few represent this better than Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi.

How did great figures like Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi transform themselves from ordinary people into radiant beacons of light that show us the latent potential in every human being? My best guess is that the dynamic of the mind plays a big role in this transformation. Just as a

brilliant scientist transforms himself from a student to a Nobel laureate by toiling with the mind, so too can people transform themselves from an average student of law to a spiritually illuminated giant (as Gandhi did) by grappling with the thinking process itself. The effort required for personal transformation is the same; the process may be a bit different.

In cultivating the intellect, we work on putting information into our mind and manipulating that information mentally to serve a purpose. In meditation or inward prayer, we work on emptying the mind of all earthly distractions and turning our attention inward to find the source of radiance that lies within us. In every religion and every spiritual tradition throughout the world, there have been people who turn their gaze inward to cease

the restless activity of the mind and tap into the source of joy which we all long to discover. This is not an intellectual exercise, and the discoveries made in this domain are not fruits of mental activity. Rather, this is a spiritual exercise, and the discoveries made are fruits of “heart experience”. I put it in this way because this is essentially what happens



deep in meditation—we are gradually transformed through an experience that expands the reservoir of our capacity to love.

This is essentially what meditation is: learning infinite love. But as Martin Luther King aptly describes, the kind of love we develop by going inward is not what the Greeks called eros, or romantic love. It is not the touchy-feely love that most of us are familiar with; there is nothing sentimental about it. Neither is it the kind of reciprocal love we are accustomed to, where we love someone because they love us (Dr. King calls this *philia*). Learning to love is infinite because it seeks nothing in return and is derived from a recognition that inside each one of us lies a dormant spark that is capable of igniting a fire that will radiate warmth throughout the entire universe. This kind of love transforms the individual into love itself and consumes every selfish desire with a yearning to serve humanity.

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Hundreds of studies conducted at more than 200 universities and research institutions in more than 30 countries demonstrate the profound benefits of meditation in the mind and the body. During meditation, the body gains a unique state of deep relaxation that dissolves accumulated stress and fatigue. Simultaneously, brain functioning becomes more orderly and as a result, the body becomes healthier and more integrated. Since the thought process is slowed down and concentrated during meditation, a more coherent style of brain functioning develops, resulting in more comprehensive, focused, and creative thinking. Among the practical benefits of meditation are:

- Stress relief
- Deepened relationships
- Improved concentration
- Overcoming bad habits
- Finding meaning in everyday life
- Freedom from past regrets and future worries
- Improved judgment and decision making
- Improved grades and work results
- Increased energy levels throughout the day
- Finding access to deeper resources
- Living up to high ideals

Students at UC Berkeley are known for their relentless striving. I am frequently amazed at the wide range of talent, intelligence, and capacities of the student body. If one person like Gandhi or Dr. King has the potential to create change, imagine what a vast community like ours can accomplish. If we work on facing our own negative states of mind and transforming ourselves inwardly, our collective capacities are unfathomable.

A Passage for Meditation

(In passage meditation, the meditator focuses on the words of a memorized passage as a means of cultivating one-pointed attention and slowing down the mind. The passage should illuminate a spiritual truth, as the words slip into the unconscious like seeds of wisdom that will manifest in daily life.)

“Prayer for Peace”
by Swami Omkar

Adorable presence,
Thou who art within and without,
above and below and all around,
Thou who art interpenetrating
every cell of my being,
Thou art the eye of my eyes,
the heart of my heart,
the mind of my mind,
the breath of my breath,
the life of my life, the soul of my soul.
Bless us, dear God, to be aware of thy presence
now and here.

May we all be aware of thy presence
in the East and the West,
in the North and the South.
May peace and good will abide among
individuals, communities, and nations.
This is my earnest prayer.

May peace be unto all!

Resources

PACS 94
Theory and Practice of Meditation
1-2 units (listed at <http://schedule.berkeley.edu>)
Meditation, Mysticism and the Mind DeCal
2-4 units (<http://meditate.berkeley.edu>)
Meditation by Eknath Easwaran
<http://www.nilgiri.org>
The San Francisco Zen Center
<http://www.sfzc.org>
Berkeley Buddhist Monastery
<http://berkeley.drba.org>