



The Journal of Patapsco Friends Meeting

July, 2014

Editor's Note:

The theme of the Quaker Heron this time is an outgrowth from some of the queries of our recent spring retreat:

How does your meditation practice or your meditation in Meeting for Worship inspire and motivate you to do work in the world? How do you bring the peace of your Quaker practice/or meditation process to the wider community?

I found the articles I have received so far quite inspiring and hope you do, as well. As I receive additional articles, I will add them and will print an expanded edition.

--Ramona Buck

My Practice by Eileen Stanzione

I struggled to share how meditation advances my spiritual practice and my work, but when I contemplated how I have helped others by seeking God's guidance, it became easier.

In working with others, including my classes, I will frequently seek guidance from my spiritual self or that part of me in synchronization with God. When I was younger, I would meditate for 5 minutes prior to meeting with each person or class. During that time, I would go into a contemplative state and ask God for guidance about how to proceed. Sometimes, in response, I would have a "knowing" as to which direction to pursue with the client, family, and/or class, and other times,

I literally felt as if I were God's vehicle. During the latter experiences, I would not know what I was going to say until I heard myself saying it and I would feel in exquisite simpatico with the person or people before me. I felt particularly appreciative when this happened, as the separation between myself and whomever became less of a barrier and my "knowing" extended to understanding what was felt, and what might be helpful to the people at hand. There was a harmony between the person and myself that was unspoken but felt. I, frankly, take little credit for the advances of my clients/students at these times. With age and strengthened belief (or less doubt), the spiritual guidance comes readily and often in a period of less than 5 minutes; actually, I often no longer have to ask, the request is implicit in my consistency of intention to be of service.

You may wonder what happens to the theories I have studied; how do they help my counseling, teaching? Because of my many years of experience, they have become integrated into my person, much as spiritual direction has become integrated into my person and practice. If someone were to ask what I just did with a client or family, I could readily recite how it fits into a particular theory or skill set; but in my heart, I know I am also being informed by the divine spark, and at this time in my life, this is what is most meaningful.

My Meditation Practice by Brian Smith

During the meditation retreat we watched the movie "Dhamma Brothers" which is an inspiring story of a small group of meditation practitioners who went into the prison system to instruct a group of committed inmates in the practice of Vipassana insight meditation. The practice retreat was an intensive silent 9-day retreat with many hours of meditation per day.

What came to my mind and inspired me was recalling a little book written by Thich Nhat Hanh called "Be Free Where You Are." This book is a transcription of the Dharma talk in 1999 by TNH to the inmates of the Hagerstown prison that some (PFM) Friends visit. The inspiring idea is that the practice of mindfulness transforms places of suffering to places of peace and that as practitioners of mindfulness meditation we can serve as a bell of mindfulness to all those that are around.

We share our peace by being peace regardless of our life situations. The true miracle is not walking on water, but how to walk on earth like a free person. The movie "Dhamma Brothers" embodied this spirit of practice. During the interviews, one inmate refers to his meditation practice and how it transformed their lives and built strong spiritual bonds with some of their fellow inmates.

For me personally, sitting and walking meditation has made a huge difference in my life. I practice every day and take many little pauses of mindful steps and mindful breaths throughout the day. This practice has assisted greatly in my being able to stay more present. The sitting meditation provides the foundation for more mindful pauses and the mindful pauses provide the support for a more solid sitting practice.

My Centering Practice

By Stuart Greene

Each of us who wish to be in communion with the Great Spirit at first must find tools to help achieve what Friends and others call a centered place. My belief is, that there are many ways and tools to use - as many as one might need but primarily each individual who wishes to seek it with perseverance will find a way that is unique and effective. Below I share with you my story with the hope that one day I might hear yours.

One day about 20 years ago sitting in one of my first meetings for worship as I was working to get to a centered place as the experienced Friends sitting around me had suggested I do, I imagined a line *perpendicular* to the ground like a paper thin telephone pole - it was centered directly in front of me a comfortable distance away. I then thought to look for an image of my consciousness. I found it as a little circular structure in the right hand hemisphere of my mind-screen and I worked meditatively to move it closer and closer to the line until I felt it *click in*. (For me this took some doing, 30 – 45 minutes at first. I found out over time however, that the process was easier the oftener I did it and correspondingly harder when I had not done it for a while or my mind was too distracted.) This *clicking in* was like a physical sensation to me – like a slam dunk in basketball and was accompanied with the Spirit given knowledge that “I was THERE” **Centered** in the Spirit. In this centered place I sensed and felt the company of an awesome loving presence and a sustained rush of joy.

I’ve gratefully used this method of centering ever since and it has been a great help to me. I’ve found that it can perform a number of functions such as giving me a clue to how far off center I have been and, in recent years additional aspects and additions to this

vision have been revealed to me. For instance about 5 years ago while I was entering into this centering practice I was shocked to find that there was *a second line* in my mind's field of vision! I had done this practice for many years experiencing only minor variations so the addition of this new structure was a big deal to me!!! This new line was like the first one except that it was *parallel* to the ground and at one point intersected with the original perpendicular centering line and it stood for **Equality!!!** Along with it came the Spirit's instruction that "where the two lines intersect was *my seat*"! Wow, what a sensation of being loved!

As I imagined myself sitting in my seat I saw on either side of me a semi circular row of people seated in their seats, none of whom I recognized nevertheless I was linked to them by the outreach of my arm with my hands on my nearest neighbors' shoulder and theirs on mine. I supposed that I was only seeing part of what was actually a grand circle. My sense was that every person seated here had knowledge of his or her place in the Universe. In the center of what if extrapolated to be a circle was the bright Light of God and everyone sat looking straight at it, all with a stoic but peaceful look on their faces. Only I was looking around in various directions.

Since that first time the exercise of having to get up to where my seat is perched has proved difficult at times. It was like climbing a mountain that seemed impossible and I was often unsuccessful however, when I did achieve being seated it was as if I had been taken to the next level of Centering. The reason it was so hard for me to gain my seat was because the Spirit was requiring that I acknowledge my worthiness to sit there – that was the mountain for me. Once attained, it is so awesome to be there feeling

the fullness and beauty of centeredness and equality.

After I began to reflect on what I had just seen it hit me – OMG, IT'S THE CROSS!!! You'd think that would have been obvious at first but it wasn't. The Cross, had never been a symbol that spoke to me. No explanation that I'd ever heard stuck with me and I wondered sometimes what all the hullabaloo was about. Maybe I still don't know but I now know what this intersection of lines means to me. The Cross is now a much-used tool in my spiritual toolbox.

With practice the process of "being seated" has become less hard and lately the Spirit is reminding me *not to overlook the process of centering* each and every time I intend to settle into worship and on occasions when I feel spontaneously visited by the Spirit. Even if I think I am feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit I must take time out to make sure I'm centered in the love of God. It's been proven to me enough times that dark influences lurk around looking for an opportunity to enter. But 'where the Loving Light shines darkness cannot remain'.

May the joy of centering be with you!

Why Meditate by Bethanne Kashkett

Why meditate? Why bother? These are questions I've been asked. At one point I probably asked them of myself ...including, why take a semester's worth of waitressing tips and spend them on TM training?!

Now, years later after steady practice, my heart knows the answer. Each morning when I begin to meditate I repeat this intention as a reminder of why I bother: I am sitting for peace, serenity and sanity. I am sitting to feel the stillness and breathe with my Higher Power. I sit to quiet my mind. I watch it run away and I practice bringing it back to the

breath / mantra over and over and over again. “Monkey mind”, it’s such a good term! In the book , “Why Meditate,” Clint Willis writes: “My brain is home to some particularly skeptical, sarcastic and mean spirited monkeys.” Exactly right! I am familiar with those monkeys. I meditate daily to tame them.

Meditation is the most important thing I do each day. That hour is my foundation. It keeps me steady and semi-balanced, so I can be present and useful to myself and others. It’s slow progress, but cumulative...a worthy investment in my own serenity.

Ram Dass said: “The only thing you really have to offer another person is your own state of being.” What can I offer, if my mind is racing, my thoughts are jangled and I have no practice that leads me back home to peace? Everyone faces obstacles and challenges in life. I have my share. Meditation is my re-fueling station. It’s a way to find the quiet stillness inside, a way to slowly learn to “welcome all things.” That kind of equanimity is a tall order- that’s why it takes so much practice! I take my troubles and questions to my practice.

Sometimes I receive messages. In the book “Polishing the Mirror”, Ram Dass wrote “the quieter your mind gets the more you are able to hear these inner messages and allow them to guide you.” This is true for me. After years of teaching vegetarian/vegan cooking classes I received the inner message to take my passion for food and feeding people out into the wider world. This year, that leading inspired me to begin volunteering for FISH as a phone intake volunteer, to serve at The Frederick Mission and Our Daily Bread. I was led to bring that concern to PFM and ask others to join me and happily they did!

Without meditation , it’s so easy to allow yourself to be rocked about by life. Pema

Chodron said “We do the big escape: we act out, say something, slam a door, hit someone, throw a pot as a way of not facing what is happening in our hearts. We can spend our whole lives escaping from the monsters of our mind.”

Meditation gives me a break from the monsters. It makes me feel less clingy and solid, more spacious and open. That’s a good place to come from to meet a messy world.

Swami Satchidananda wrote “If you free your own mind, at least that little part of the world will be free from trouble. If we want a world free from violence, we should free ourselves from every kind of violence, even in thought. If we want a peaceful world, let us begin with ourselves. May the whole world be filled with peace and joy, love and Light.”

That is why I practice. I long for a world filled with peace and joy, love and Light, so I start with my own jangled mind and my own achy heart.

To Enter the Silence by Bob Rhudy

I meditate to enter the silence. To become present and attentive to here and now. Seeking to listen and discern what matters. Thy will be done. To heal and grow in body, mind and spirit. Love God, neighbor, and self.

Remember to breathe. In, slowly. Stop. Out, slowly. Stop. Again. And again. As it was in the beginning, is now, and always will be. I meditate to enter the silence. We seek to share what we find.

Meditation

by Gabriel A. Cannon, South Mountain Friends Fellowship

When I was in high school, I was the captain of the cross-country team and swim club. I have always enjoyed running a great distance. I noticed when I had a repetitive breathing pattern, I ran well and felt great afterwards. I especially enjoyed swimming in an open outdoor swimming pool. I noticed when I had a routine breathing pattern, my swimming was effortless. Lap after lap was so peaceful and I felt enlightened afterwards. I simply took my mind away from the worldly things and tasks, and simply concentrated on my breathing. Then I began to notice the little things like the sun beaming through the trees and down through the water. It gave me the sense of tranquility and mindlessness took over. Afterwards, I never thought it was a workout.

While in college, I worked as a lifeguard and pool manager. I distinctly reminisce of the many occasions I had to guard a local beach/bay called Ocean View in Norfolk, Virginia. As a lifeguard, I had to sit in the stand for hours at a time and look upon the water and swimmers. Despite the fact that no one was in the water, lifeguards were required to stay in their stand/post. During those times, I would gaze upon nature and simply listen to the waves crash down on the stand, birds flapping their wings above. During those moments, I recognized my breathing and the serenity of that specific moment of peace and harmony. I did not want to be in any other place but in that lifeguard stand.

When I was younger, I enjoyed challenging myself physically. I really found peace in my heart and soul when I took my body to the extreme. Particularly, I enjoyed participating in triathlons. To swim, bike and then run was fun to me. This event was

a metaphor of life to me – meaning – in early years, people within your life give you assistance and guidance, which represents the buoyance of the water. Your second phase of life deals with your middle age adult years which is represented by the bike, because one uses his knowledge, education or skill to travel through life. Lastly, the run represents your elderly years because you are alone with no assistance. And, it's the most difficult to complete.

During each event, I focused on my breathing and allowed my mind to be completely blank, and focused all my attention inward. I always said to myself, "If I can complete a triathlon where my body is challenged physically, psychologically and spiritually, without giving up, then I can manage any life obstacles thrown in my way.

During my incarceration, I have learned that I was on to something, but didn't know what it was. A meditation class was being offered here at MCI-H. The class was being taught by outside volunteer guests who have much experience in meditation. I felt a leading to explore this class. I finally took it for a year, once a week. Unfortunately, due to institutional rules and policies, I could not attend two religious/spiritual groups at the same time. Therefore, during my sabbatical year, I had to stop attending South Mountain Friends Fellowship.

During that time, I discovered many forms and techniques for meditation. Personally, I enjoy simply just sitting in a chair and being mindful and aware of the present moment. The counting of my breath is my favorite. Today, I use meditation to reduce the tension, anxiety and stress of penal life. It clears my thinking and I become less angry towards people who have disappointed me, and physically hurt me in the past. After I meditate, I feel an increased self-understanding and self-acceptance. I also

feel more joyful and have love in my heart towards others.

It has taken some time to control my feelings and maintain my peace of mind. Meditation helps me calm my mind and body. I did not know the many benefits of meditation until I took that class. It has taught me to slow down and take moment as it comes. I notice the little things in life, such as sounds, smell and my breath. To notice a rainbow in the sky was never on my mind when I first entered prison. Today, I notice the snowflakes falling from the night sky and observe the bright stars during a workout on the bench, despite the barb wire fence around me.

Meditation is an ongoing exercise for me. I notice when I don't meditate, my life is out of sync. Formal meditation is one way, but I have to learn to be mindful and attentive from minute to minute. Thich Nhat Hanh said that memories of the past and thoughts of the future are present right now.

I have discovered that for years prior to my incarceration, I have been meditating in some form. Today, I am housed in a privileged honor housing for role model inmates. Presently, there are two cats, three kittens, ten dogs, four puppies and four goldfish. Despite my roommates, I still have the opportunity and space to meditate on a regular basis. I am indeed happy for this because a couple thousand inmates here at MCI-H don't have any privacy, space or quiet are to meditate. I wish all my fellow residents would take at least one session of meditation.

Through my meditation class, I was taught that I can still meditate while walking or running. I can literally feel my breath as it enters and leaves my body and I am mindful of these sensations. I enjoy the simplicity and directness of the experience and the feeling afterwards.

I look forward to being near the beach shore again and hearing the waves and just being in the moment and at peace. I look forward to diving into an outdoor pool on a sunny day and swimming lap after lap and searching for the inner peace, love and wisdom that all individuals seek in life, and around the entire world.

Never Actually Missed

By Darren "Tony" McCoy, South Mountain

(Ed. Note: Although Tony McCoy of the South Mountain Friends Fellowship did not submit his poem for this particular issue, he did give it to me to see if it could be published and I have submitted it to the Friends Journal but they haven't published it at this time. The poem does focus on his spiritual journey, so it seemed very appropriate to include it here.)

Tucked away like a discarded piece of clothing,
Never actually missed.

If a man is so judged by his possessions or accomplishments,
I don't even actually exist.

A mere silhouette of what could have been
And the living shadow of what might be,

Quarantined like some deadly disease
Because a virus should never run free.

Infected with the desire to live
But systematically educated to seek death,

Suicidal, homicidal lifestyle habits practiced
Until there's nothing left.

A mouse caught in an enormous maze,
Doors opening only to serve the cheese,

Dreams of forgiveness and salvation a daily occurrence
Often played out on my knees.

Who shall answer my pleas and prayers
Or do I even deserve a reply?

Decades and decades of being a failure
But can I beat this if I try?

Can I, would I, should I
If I were to ask a simple question indeed.

I hungered and thirst for knowledge and
truth
So now as a Quaker I feed.

Sure I believe in the written word of the
BIBLE
But I tend to practice more than I preach.

George Fox said to be patterns and examples
in all countries and places
For that's the way that we teach.
So I search for the light of GOD inside of
me
And I acknowledge it in everyone I meet.

For so long I've been waiting for GOD to
give me the answers
But now his purpose for me I seek.

God could be a her or a him or maybe a
them
And perhaps I'll never know this fact.

Today I'm aware that there's a presence in
my life
That helps me pay attention to how I act.

Just a number I am not and a statistic I'll
never be
As I've learned to fight with more than my
fist.

Although I'm still tucked away like a
discarded piece of clothing
What I used to be is never actually missed.

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What Meditation Means to Me

By David Zeller, South Mountain

It's hard for me to meditate because of my
schizophrenia. When I try to sleep my mind
races with thoughts. At first the 20 minutes
of silence was an eternity my mind raced.
But after a couple of meetings I settled down
and tried to just be calm and to leave my
mind open to see what would happen.

Difficult as it was, gradually a peace came
over me. I stopped all my worrying, like
suddenly, a voice said to believe. Just have
faith things can only get better for you. Stay
the path and maintain your optimism.

It has helped to keep me coming back
because I seem to be able to get answers for
problems and issues that arise. I use the
meditation time now to try and relax, be
open, and receptive to more positive
thoughts. Meditation is a period to allow
ourselves to open up and to clear all the
clutter from our minds. And maybe, just
maybe, God will supply the proper thoughts,
answers, we need to get through our daily
lives. He will deliver his will for us to try
and follow.

Meditation – A Work in Progress

By Kent Allen Brewer, South Mountain

Since March 15, 2013, I have been attending the South Mountain Friends Fellowship located within the confines of the Maryland Correctional Institution at Hagerstown.

Right from the start, I had a really difficult time handling the twenty long minutes spent in meditation; an eternity of empty individual seconds with each crawling by with all the blinding speed of a snail on Librium – all one thousand two hundred of them.

With the passage of time, I find myself becoming less and less concerned with the time factor and more involved with the free roaming images produced. Wonderful images which take me out of this prison if only for a short while. My meditational journeys have varied in their nature; the sweet scent of lilacs outside my cabin door; horse buggies; learning a new dance step; cinnamon strudel coffeecake; the beauty of a Vermont winter.

As pleasurable as these wandering thoughts may be, I instinctively know that I'm allowing a precious opportunity to pass me by to actually see and closely examine myself and my world on an extremely honest and intimate level. I believe that I have progressed to a point in my meditation where I now demand a degree of personal discipline in channeling my thoughts to specific areas which deserve and require meaningful reflection. Surely, I'm seeing myself and my world in a much clearer light.

Do I still indulge in moments of pleasurable reminiscence? Of course! But, my meditations are a work in progress.