

What is Meditation?

by Don Oakley, 2018

We've all heard a lot of instructions about what meditation should look like. The primary one, of course, is that we should quiet our mind in order to be more peaceful. Meditation can be used like that. It can be used as medicine. "I'm feeling agitated. I think I'll meditate for a while so I'll feel better." That's great, but what I'd like to talk about is how meditation can be taken to a much deeper level, and that deeper level is to view it as an opportunity to allow everything to be as it is. In other words, what happens when we're not trying to make something else happen? What happens when we're not trying to get enlightened? What happens when we are not trying to silence our minds? What happens when we just put everything into neutral?

We're still attentive, we're still here and not going to sleep. We're in a receptive mode; not expecting anything, but just seeing what's already there when we're not trying to make something else happen. This means not trying to stop our thoughts, not trying to attain enlightenment, not trying to keep our disturbing thoughts at bay, not trying to become peaceful – none of that. Just allowing whatever arises to arise. Without judgment or manipulation.

When we sit down and agitated thoughts arise, a busy mind, my sense is that it's really the body's wisdom. It's the body taking the opportunity, that it may rarely be given, to unload – unload some data, free some hard drive space. We can allow that to be. After all, who are we to say that the body shouldn't do that? This is being receptive to what is.

Meditation is certainly a benefit if we can find the free time to do it every day. If we live in a busy household or a noisy neighbourhood, that might be more challenging, but whatever we can do to find a quiet place, that's wonderful. If we can't, or during those other times of the day when we're not sitting quietly in a protected space, there are many other opportunities to drop into a meditative space. It's possible while waiting 30 seconds at a stop light, checking out at the grocery store, walking down the street, going from one room to another in the house, going for a daily walk, or while waiting for the water to boil.

There are many opportunities during the day because meditation doesn't have to look a certain way. It's really just the opportunity to check in with ourselves and allow thoughts to be there. If they are, allow them to be there and just see what is present. It's an opportunity to take an up-close and personal look at the activity of our own mind. We can approach it with a childlike curiosity. We can also question whether a sense of stillness, a sense of simple everyday awareness, is not *already present* before we go looking for it. It's really an opportunity to see what's already present, right here, right now, without expectations, hopes, fears, and desires. It's just recognizing the simplicity present moment and allowing ourselves to rest there in that sense of "Yes, I exist, I am."