

One Meditation #2, Feb. 2025: “Cabin or Lake? Four Main Focuses” (Apr. 4, 2025)

Welcome to the second issue of this monthly Meditation email—about 200 members. As a reminder, most of you are here by individual invitation. A smaller group listed your email in public sources, and I thought you might enjoy these messages: 300-600 words monthly on meditation new or ancient, Western or Eastern, scientific or spiritual. Your email never is shared, no reply is needed, and you’re welcome to let me know if you’d like to unsubscribe. I’ve meditated and researched meditation for 60+ years and have graduate degrees in the field. My website is www.richardjewell.org. Thanks again for being here! – Richard

#2, Feb. 2025: WHAT ARE FOUR MAIN FOCUSES IN MEDITATION?

Last month, I described how you can meditate using many positions, times, and places. This month features four different ways to focus your attention.

Imagine you wake up in a lakeside cabin of your own. The air is warm, and as you make your breakfast or drink, the scent of the water drifts in your window while birds call from the nearby forest. What will you do next: stay inside, or go out? And will you choose to busy yourself with an activity, or simply enjoy doing nothing?

This scene, as you perhaps are guessing, is an analogy. It symbolizes four major ways of focusing in meditation.

Inside or Beyond?

When meditating, do you want to stay in the cabin—your body—or go well outside it? To stay within is a focus on the “inner” or “immanent.” The outside, away from your porch and outer walls, means what often is called “the beyond” or “the transcendent.” Scientific studies and major spiritual traditions help explain both.

Eastern practices in particular—and some mystical Western ones—are well known for inner attention: for example, a focus on the heart, the top of the head, the “third eye,” or an inner feeling. And Western practices (as well as some Eastern ones) often aim at “the beyond”: praying, singing, or even dancing, for example, to heaven, God, or an angel.

Some meditation methods combine both the inner and the beyond. You go back and forth between both. Wherever you are, you practice mindfulness: observing what you are doing without reacting to your observations. Such practices often have developed from Zen, Native American, Taoist, or similar mystical traditions; and from modern movements such as transpersonal psychology, psychedelic trips, and Be Here Now approaches. For example, a popular, modern, back-and-forth method is mindfulness. Zen mystic Thich Nhat Hanh explains in *The Miracle of Mindfulness* how you simply can observe your breath; or watch each inner and outer thought, feeling, and sensory experience while washing your dishes.

With Content or in Stillness?

How about the other pair of opposites: becoming busy with an activity versus sitting in calm quiet? These, too, have their equivalent in meditation. They represent meditating “with active content,” or seeking “no content.”

“With active content” means that you use a particular meditation activity to help you focus, such as chanting, prayer, visualizing of an image, or mindful physical movement. “No content” means that you seek, in your meditating, to get rid of thoughts, emotions, and desires—dissolving or rejecting them—to find an inner state of calm, silent stillness.

The latter, seeking no content, is difficult to achieve, even for those who have meditated for years, sometimes. Thus this “no content” focus often employs at least one meditative activity—like a pole or axle on a wheel—around which to build inner silence and calm. The pole might be deep breathing, a chant, an image, nature, strenuous exercise, or something else. The Western “Centering Prayer” movement recommends using a helper, for example, as do traditional yoga meditation in the ancient Hindu *Yoga Sutras*, and ancient and modern pagan practices. Another example is Hindu, Abrahamic (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim), and other religions’ practice of heartfulness meditation—a focus on loving—in part to establish inner stillness.

How do I meditate? On a good day, I use all four, thanks to the grace of time in retirement. I concentrate on a point within myself. That takes me to the beyond. I look for stillness, too. And sometimes I use an aid to help me find it.

What works best for people? Often it is, simply, whatever keeps you meditating.

Next Month: DEEP BREATHING—THE INCREDIBLE SIGH

Peace, Strength, Joy

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