



Zen techniques prove beneficial

A patient of mine could not stop her thoughts from racing. Even at work, worries about past, present and future occurred. She did not sleep well and was tired during the day.

I gave her an exercise from my own experience with Zen meditation: Sit comfortably on a wood chair or stool with feet on the floor. Settle in to a good posture – ears, shoulders and hipbones in alignment, eyes relaxed, gazing about a 45 degree to the floor. Count each breath on its exhalation. Count up to 10 then begin again.

As any thoughts or feelings arise, don't resist them: simply concentrate on the words, "don't know." Sit for whatever amount of time is comfortable. Gradually increase the time, up to 20 or 30 minutes. The breath should come from the belly. Focus attention about one inch below the navel. Keep in mind that nothing is wrong, anxiety and calm will both occur during this practice. Don't hold on to either.

She raved about this technique three weeks later. Everything in her life felt better. She had worked her meditation time up to five minutes. For the beginner, however, five minutes a day can be a lot.

Meditation integrates us. As thoughts are simply watched, feelings come out. As those are watched, physical sensations, even discomforts, might arise. Just keep practicing. Results are not just a calmer mind, but also an ability to be decisive or indecisive. Thoughts, feelings and actions become more useful: We see things clearly.

A newer talk therapy developed by Dr. David Berenson, psychiatrist, is really a talk meditation. Emotions are allowed to come out, their physical location is identified—fear results in queasy stomach, for example—then the sensation transforms to another emotion or ultimately, a texture.

Anger might mutate to the texture of joy, fear to curiosity, sadness to compassion. This progression is highly preferable to having anxiety.

An alternate Zen technique to the "don't know" exercise might be better for those who have a problem with "don't know," and is similar to Berenson's technique. The posture and breath count are the same. When thoughts come up, use a simple labeling system to identify them: Thinking, judging and seeing, for example. Hearing is hearing. Feeling is called feeling.

After trying this technique, add the terms pleasant and unpleasant to the initial labels. Finally, to this second tier of terms, add "both" (unpleasant and pleasant) and "neither." Typical sequences in the exercise could be: judging, pleasant; feeling, unpleasant; thinking, neither, or thinking, both.

Physical health often improves with meditation. Studies demonstrate that Transcendental Meditation might lower the thickness of plaque in the arteries, lower average blood pressure and reduce stress. Anything that improves thought, body and emotions is affecting one's energy. Less energy wasted. More is used to love a healthy life.

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