

Meditations on Meditation: A Narrative Analysis

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“*Buddhist meditation is the practice of meditation in Buddhism. Buddhist meditation is a practical topic that has applied to practice and is an interesting topic in academic academia that the Journal of Buddhist Studies is focusing. Applying inquiry on Meditation to research in schools for students doing academic research is a great opportunity for the academic field.*

- Thich Giac Chinh, Chief Editor.

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Much research has been conducted on the benefits of meditation. For example, a study examining 351 working adults found that those with greater meditation experience enjoyed “less perceived stress and negative mental

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health” compared to individuals without as much mindfulness exposure³. Similarly, other research has found that after a 10-week mindfulness meditation program, participants with “severe emotional difficulties” experienced “notable improvement[s] over time” regarding their ability to cope with their struggles⁴.

Yet, much of meditation’s benefits lie beyond quantitative measurement. After all, the meditative experience, reflecting the arguments of many practitioners, is something that words cannot encapsulate – it is a ‘mystical’ experience that cannot ultimately be categorized, compartmentalized, and measured with a regular instrument. Hence, I believe, in the words of one study, that there is a need to introduce alternative “methods to capture the depth and breadth of the mindfulness experience”⁵.

This is where narrative analysis comes into to play. This method of investigation examines the qualitative experiences of people and explores their interpretation of phenomena. Given the extremely subjective nature of the meditative experience, narrative

³ Chu, Li-Chuan. "The benefits of meditation vis-à-vis emotional intelligence, perceived stress and negative mental health." *Stress and Health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 26.2 (2010): 169-180.

⁴ Schreiner, Istvan, and James P. Malcolm. "The Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation: Changes in Emotional States of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress." *Behaviour Change* 25.3 (2008).

⁵ Sears, Sharon R., et al. "Perceived benefits and doubts of participants in a weekly meditation study." *Mindfulness* 2.3 (2011): 167-174.

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analysis is the ideal means of capturing the life-changing 'essence' of such a spiritual awakening. Put simply, meditation is subjective, and narrative analysis, by enabling the individual to express his or her story, acknowledges this subjective perspective.

Thus, this paper, in line with the narrative analysis method, will detail my personal experience with meditation and why I believe this practice holds the power to radically transform modern society. As Mr. Bach also pointed out that we are the leaders of our society and that: "Leaders, in any institution, may have many virtues and spirituality qualities. As spiritual leaders, one must live peaceful and harmonious lives in accordance with our family, community, society, and homeland. They often have strong relationships with others and have strong inner values such as selflessness and harmony." Thus, this paper is also an opportunity to explore my universe within to truly truly understand my inner peace and beings.

Meditation: Watching Our Thoughts

There are numerous definitions of meditation. Some say it is to "focus the mind" while others explain that it is a matter of "placing concentration on the breath." All these characterizations are correct. However, in my life, I have found the following definition to be the simplest: meditation is the practice of observing our thoughts pass through our mind just like how we observe clouds pass in the sky. That is all.

In this article, I want to demonstrate why meditation is a powerful force for good. I will start off by detailing the impact of meditation on

my life before describing the grand revelation I received from this practice. Then, I will explain how meditation applies to solving the world's problems. Finally, I will end by sharing my personal daily meditative practice, my conclusions, and further questions.

Meditation in High School

I started my journey with meditation in my freshman year of high school in the Mindful Lunch program. My chemistry teacher introduced me and a group of my peers to this practice as a means of reducing our stress. We practiced mindfulness meditation during lunch at school, where we observed our breaths in silence and relinquished any anxiety we might have had over an upcoming precalculus test or English literary presentation. We simply embraced the bliss of the present moment. In time, I began meditating not just during lunch, but also at my desk in class before exams. With my mind clearer and calmer, my academics enjoyed a noticeable improvement.

But meditation's benefits were not limited to academics. This practice also benefited my extracurriculars, specifically my performance in high school debate competitions. Before tournament rounds, I would sit down and reduce my breathing pace. Once I was in a deep state of consciousness, I would imagine delivering my debate argument. I would mentally rehearse my speech with perfect articulation, emphasis, and style. When I opened my eyes, I would be in what I can only describe as a 'hyper-focused' state. No thought would cross my mind. Time seemed to slow down, and my observation of the subtleties of the present moment heightened. My ego dissolved and all that remained was pure awareness. I felt like a laser beam of consciousness – directed and focused energy.

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This 'flow' state, a result of my meditation, allowed me to avoid feelings of anxiety, enabling me to perform at my highest level. Indeed, I would not have achieved the national levels of success I did in my debate career if it were not for meditation.

By the end of my sophomore year, I could recognize that meditation was a potent tool for augmenting my school performance. Yet, I had only scratched the surface of this practice. In my following year, I would experience meditation's true power and the stunning extent to which this practice can shift our consciousness, transforming our entire experience of life.

Meditation and the Supreme Self

While I had always had personal issues to deal with, these problems reached a whole new level in my junior year. A household fight in front of my best friend left me humiliated and embarrassed. Then, three months later, I had to cope with witnessing the attempted suicide of a close family member. These experiences, in addition to the other instances of adversity in my junior year, culminated in a deep depression with repeated nightmares. I felt like all the 'pillars' of my life were collapsing.

One night, after a particularly horrifying nightmare, I reached my breaking point. I left home, despite it almost being midnight, and wandered aimlessly. Eventually, I went to an empty park.

I did not feel butterflies in my stomach; I felt hornets. It was as though I was plunging into a deep, dark hole with no ground to break the fall.

My heart raced. I did not think I possessed the strength needed to deal with my adversity any

longer. Then, I had a thought that I knew I should not have had, and, in a panic, I took out my phone and tried to call the National Suicide Hotline. But right as I was about to hit "call," I paused.

I was at rock-bottom, and yet, here I was, alive and ever conscious. I felt like I was drowning, but I was still breathing. "What is keeping me afloat?" I wondered.

My heart rate slowed, my shoulders relaxed, and I felt the air go in and out of my lungs, slower and gentler with each iteration. I closed my eyes and felt the bristles of grass graze against my legs, and I became absorbed with the delicate symphony of the night – the cool breeze brushing against the trees, the sounds of crickets and frogs, and the occasional passing of a distant car. I felt as though every particle of dust in the entire universe was precisely where it needed to be – a perfect harmony that ultimately cannot be encapsulated into words. Put simply, that night, I meditated.

And in that deep state of consciousness, I watched my thoughts, and all the emotions and physical sensations they represented, pass through my mind just as clouds pass through the sky. The memories of my past adversities and the worries over potential future setbacks flowed away, down my stream of consciousness. I was relaxed.

But then, I decided to experiment. I was watching my thoughts, but I wondered, "Who is the one that watches these thoughts in my head?" Thus, I decided to *watch the watcher* of my thoughts. But then I asked, "Why not go further?" So, I *watched the watcher of the watcher* of my thoughts. I realized soon that I could do this 'game' for an infinite number of

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iterations... on and on... and then, it hit me. I had a revelation.

We are not our minds, and we are not our bodies. The fact that I could observe my thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, as 'separate' from my awareness in my head, was proof that "I" was *not* those thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. I might think certain ideas, feel certain emotions, and experience certain bodily sensations, but these *are not* me, just like how the audience of a movie *is not* the movie itself. The audience, instead, is an observer *separate* from the movie. And the fact that I could watch the watcher of my thoughts on until infinity further solidified the distinction between *my awareness* and *what I was aware of*.

But this begs the question, if we are not our mind nor body, then what are we? *Who is the "I" that observes me in my head?* Well, a psychologist might argue that "I" – that fundamental essence of my being – is nothing more than the unconscious mind. On the other hand, a more spiritual person might say that this pure awareness is the *eternal* self – the soul, atman, or spirit. Yet, regardless of what that deeper essence is, meditation, by freeing me of perpetual thinking, allowed me to connect with that all-powerful core of my being and realize that I am that.

Knowing – and *feeling* – that deeper Supreme Self beyond pain and sorrow gave me the strength to rise above my adversity. By meditating, I recognized that I was, am, and always will be *enough, whole, and ultimately, eternal*. Adversity might hurt, but it would *never permanently* hurt the core of who I was. Rather, adversity is nothing but a fleeting experience – a temporary blip in time when compared to the infinite eternity of spirit.

Becoming aware of this indestructible all-confident part of myself transformed my life. This realization gave me the energy to develop loving friendships, take control of my academics, write a book, and create over 45 pieces of art. And none of this would have been possible if it were not for meditation, a practice that taught me who "I" really am.

Meditation: A Magnificent Agent of Change

Why do criminals kill? Why do tyrants subordinate their fellow human beings? Why are people feeling more isolated than ever despite living in the most connected era of human history? I believe these issues, as well as *all* human-caused ills, are, at their core, a consequence of our personal insecurity with ourselves – with who we are.

People worry over whether they are "worthy" enough to be in a friend group, "strong" enough to lead a company or country, or "good" enough to ask better of themselves and others. This lack of self-confidence with who we are on the inside drives an unsustainable obsession to "prove" ourselves to others on the outside. And the consequences of this are, unfortunately, omnipresent.

Too many young people, in an effort to "prove" their social status, feel anxious if an Instagram post of theirs fails to reach a certain number of likes. Too many middle-aged men, in an effort to "prove" their masculinity, join dangerous militia groups threatening the safety of our institutions and our country. Too many CEOs, in an effort to "prove" their success, fall into the addictive trap of greed, stopping at nothing – not even child sweatshops – to make a profit. And too many politicians, in an effort to "prove"

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their power, engage in corrupt abuses of authority at the cost of the everyday voter.

In summation, we wreak havoc because we are afraid that we are not "enough," whether it be in our businesses, careers, personal lives, or, as it were in my case, in our ability to deal with adversity. This needs to, should, and *can* be stopped. We just need to *breathe*.

Indeed, the antidote to this epidemic of personal inadequacy is to *realize* our power within – to realize that Supreme Self present within *all* of us. And as I found through my experience at the park, meditation and its power to purify our spirit is a potent means of attaining and experiencing this eternal consciousness.

That's why I believe that if *everyone*, all 7.6 billion people on this planet, meditated for just 10 minutes and attained deep consciousness, the world would be thrust into a Golden Era. People would be aware of the universe *within* themselves, with its infinite reservoir of love, satisfaction, and peace. The fear of fear, the anxiety of anxiousness, and the depression of depression would cease. Individuals, from CEOs and politicians to students and workers, having realized that they were always *enough*, would achieve internal peace, thus eliminating the desire to unsustainably "prove" themselves. Humanity would mirror the harmony of nature, embracing gentle, compassionate, and ever-wise pure awareness. Simply put, people would not live to prove their life's worth; they would just live to live.

Undoubtedly, if we are to usher in the next Golden Age, meditation must be emphasized in our education, culture, and careers. It must become as ubiquitous as exercise.

Because after all, monumental change begins on an individual basis, with everyday people changing their thoughts and actions. It starts with ordinary human beings, you and me, realizing who we truly are. It starts with us discovering who it is in our head that observes our thoughts. In short, it starts with meditation.

My Daily Practice

Now I will explain my daily practice of meditation. To get into the meditative state (whether it be in the morning or at any other time in the day) using my method, do the following:

1. Lie down flat on a bed and close your eyes.
 - a. This, as opposed to sitting, I have found, is the fastest way to relax the body. Just remember not to fall asleep.
2. Take a deep breath in, hold for three seconds, release, and then pause for another three seconds.
 - a. Repeat this three times.
3. Then, with your eyes closed, pretend you are looking up at your eyebrows. After you do this (with your eyes still closed), relax your gaze and look straight forward. You will feel a sensation in your forehead when you do this.
 - a. Repeat this three times.
4. Next, visualize looking down at a series of 12 steps and imagine

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yourself descending these stairs to the landing below, slowly, one step at a time.

5. By the time you reach the landing, you will be in the meditative state.

At this point, you can watch your thoughts, make positive affirmations to yourself, visualize a solution to a problem, or do anything that your being can imagine. Most importantly though, in this deep state of meditation, you can connect with the empowering energized outlet of spirit and embrace the Supreme Self.

Conclusions & Further Questions

Meditation undoubtedly played an instrumental role in giving me a new outlook and direction in life. Hence, my experience emphasizes the importance of changing our society's habits.

Our modern world, ever obsessed with materialism, forgets to look within. We are so focused on examining and exploring external phenomena that we neglect to probe the *deepest* of all questions – that conscious subjective experience of “I.” And yet, despite our aversion to seriously studying and respecting the legitimacy of this subjective phenomena, it is these *very* personal stories that ultimately dictate how we experience reality. Meditation, with its myriad of benefits, proves this point.

Of course, there will always be further research needed regarding meditation – and any phenomena for that matter. We have yet to find the answers to the most fundamental questions brought by meditation: *what exactly* is that deeper Self those who practice meditation feel?

And what, in an academic sense, is a mystical experience?

Indeed, meditation demonstrates that there is an entire universe *within* that we have yet to chart, explore, and truly understand.

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