



Meditation Hesitation: The Importance of Awareness

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WCH Connection Room
February 1, 2023

Who am I (to talk about this)?

- Dalinda Reese
- MD (USA, retired from medicine 2019)
- Masters Theological Studies
- MA Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy
- SoulWise Listener (*Lev Shomea* Spiritual Direction)
- A contemplative at heart
- A fellow human being on this amazing journey called “Life” – doing my best to navigate it with integrity

(Many factors inform my thinking. These perspectives – and the following information – are filtered through my own lenses. I trust you to discern what, if any of this, may be helpful to you – and to discard what doesn't resonate....)

You can't do "meditation"

- o One of the ethics review board objections to my Forgiveness Research project proposal (also had issues with "forgiveness" and other words)

Why not “meditation”?

- Too “loaded” a term – might offend, might suggest a religious practice that not everyone is comfortable with
- (“Academic Secularism” is neither neutral nor objective, IMHO)
- For some religious and/ or spiritual people, there is concern that “meditation” suggests an allegiance to other gods – and/ or may put us in a trance or a state that opens us up to unholy forces

About unholy forces...

going on *in plain sight*

and *outside of our awareness*

Behavioral engineering – observation and manipulation of our thoughts and feelings

o Behavioral Insights Team <https://www.bi.team/> known as “Nudge Unit”; founded 2010 UK → now global influence, as of Dec 2021 it’s an independent charity

o Susan Delacourt: ““The nudge unit’: Ottawa’s behavioural science team investigates how Canadians feel...” <https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2021/02/21/the-nudge-unit-ottawas-behavioural-science-team-investigates-how-canadians-feel-about-vaccines-public-health-and-who-to-trust.html>

o Dr. Gary Sidley: “The nudge: ethically dubious and ineffective,” <https://brownstone.org/articles/the-nudge-ethically-dubious-and-ineffective/>

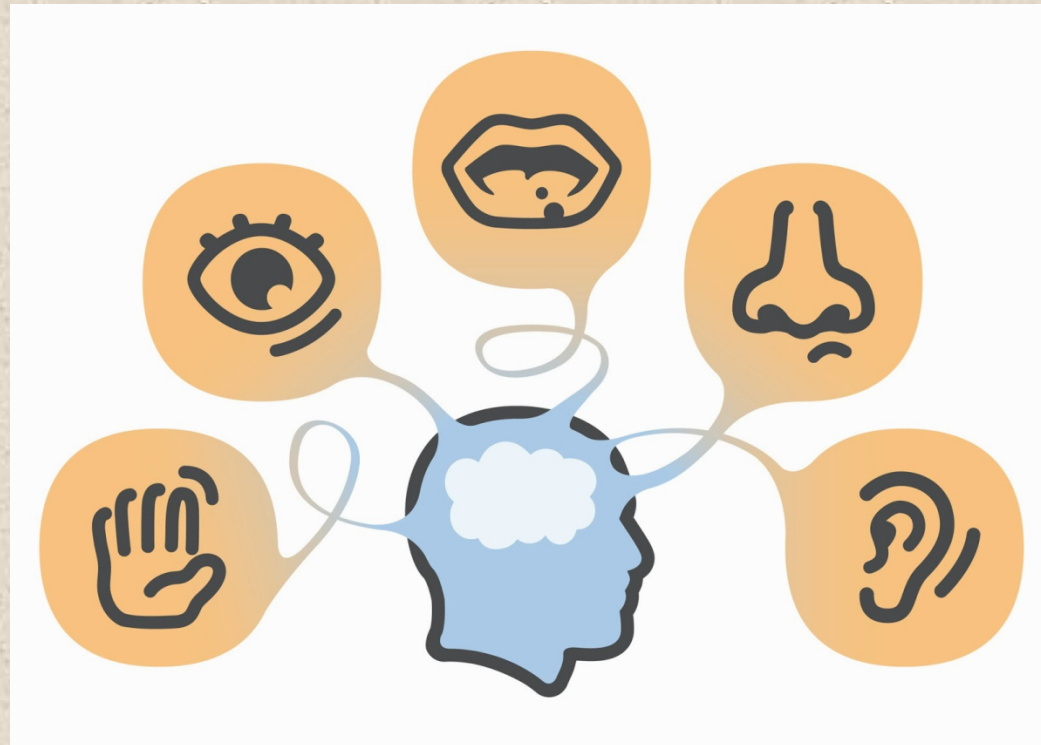
Awareness and Meditation

What meditation is:

- A Spiritual practice
- A Physical/ physiologic practice
- An **Awareness** practice
 - Focused awareness
 - Expanded awareness

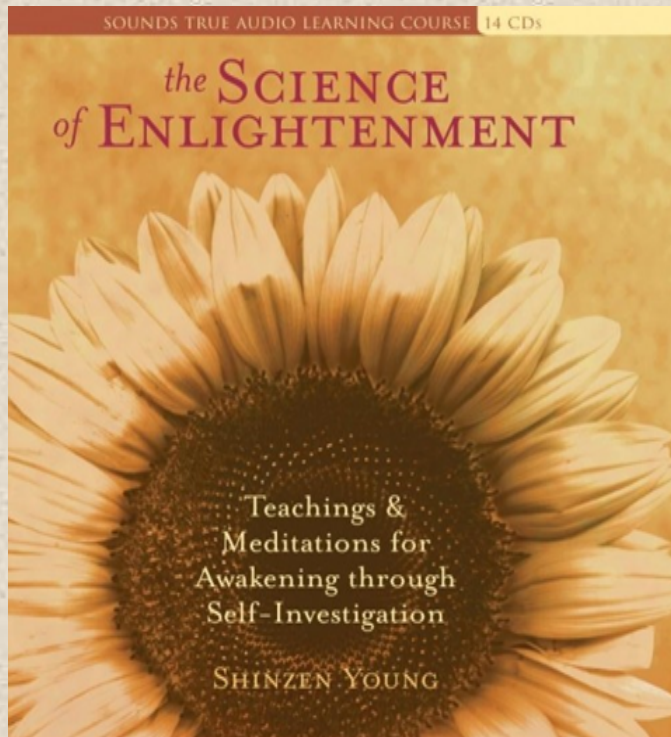
Awareness: Five Senses (only?)

- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch



Six Buddhist “Sense Doors”

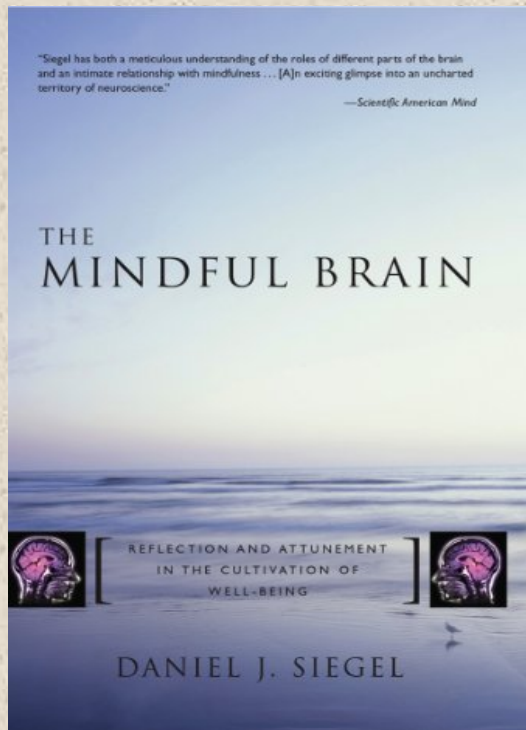
The Science of Enlightenment, Shinzen Young(2005)



- o Sight
- o Sound
- o Smell
- o Taste
- o Feeling body
- o Sensing mind

Eight Mindsight Senses

The Mindful Brain, Daniel J. Siegel, MD (2007)



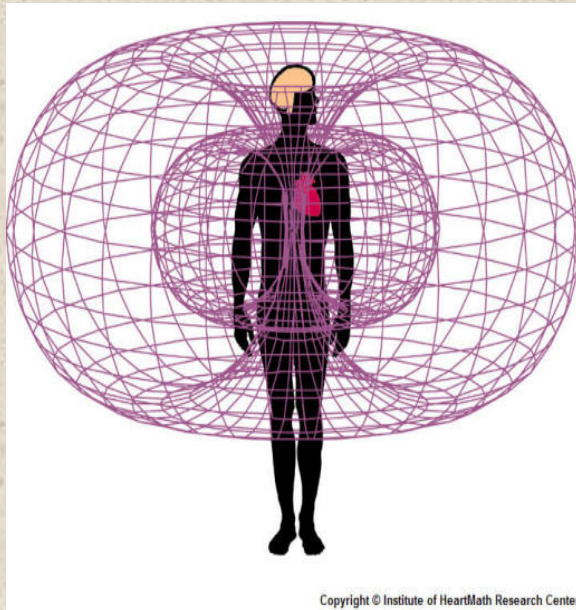
- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Sense of body's inner workings
- Sense of mind (SIFT)
- Sense of connection to/relationship with others or something beyond ourselves

Awareness centers:

- o Thinking Mind
 - o Sensations, Images, Feelings, Thoughts
- o Feeling Body (“Gut Feelings”)
 - o Intimately attuned to our body and to our nervous systems (vagus nerve, neurotransmitters, and other input)
- o Knowing Heart (Prov. 4:23 Guard your heart, the wellspring of life)
 - o Below the anxiety and emotions...

HeartMath

Electromagnetic field of the heart



Heart-Brain communication

○ Neurological

- Bidirectional nerves

○ Biochemical

- Hormones, chemicals, neurotransmitters

○ Biophysical

- Volume, pressure, mechanics

○ Energetic

- HRV, Heart coherence

<https://www.heartmath.org/science/>

Heart centered awareness

HeartMath practice

- o Uses apps that measure Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and Heart Coherence
- o 4 levels – can get to first two levels with breathing alone, need to engage the heart to get to levels 3 and 4
- o (Buddhist monks were already at level 4)

Positive Emotional Refocusing Technique (PERT)

Fred Luskin, Stanford Forgiveness Project, *Forgive for Good* (2001)

- o Focus on soft-belly breathing
- o Think of something for which you are deeply grateful and “feel” that in your chest heart center
- o Breathe through your heart center
- o Notice the peace, calm, spaciousness

(Entrainment)

- o Synchronizing, drawing you in to another rhythm (why they have “pumping” music in gyms)
- o Sounds/ music/ voice modulation can all influence our nervous system
- o Tempo and visual images can grab our attention (entertainment media, marketing)
- o Movement can jar or soothe
- o Emotional states can draw us in

Relaxation Response/ Remembered Wellness

Herbert Benson, MD <https://bensonhenryinstitute.org/>

- ~ Our physiology responds to what we think about (lemons, salt air by the sea, childhood rituals, prayers)
- ~ Focusing on remembered wellness in our minds can help our bodies calm, heal, and improve wellbeing

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD <http://www.mbsrtraining.com/>

- ~ MBSR training incorporates aspects of yoga and mindfulness to reduce stress and increase wellbeing
- ~ *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of your Mind and Body to Cope with Stress, Pain, and Illness* (1990, revised 2013)

Selected slides from 10/2/2013 DBR in-service presentation "Selected Highlights of Harvard Seminar: The New Science of Resiliency and its Clinical Applications, Boston, September 17-20, 2013

Sara Lasar, PhD

- Meditation is a behavior that over time should and can affect brain structure
- Meditation **activates** Insula, Temporal lobe, and Anterior Cingulate Gyrus – area which connect the gray matter to the white matter of the brain (whole brain, expansive, compassionate thinking), and **decreases** activity in the Amygdala and Default Mode Network (fear, stress response)
- 8 wks MBSR increased gray matter and hippocampus in brain

Relaxation Response (Bhasin, M et al, 2013, PLoS ONE)

Has positive effects on

- Mitochondrial energy metabolism
- Insulin secretion
- Inflammatory pathways (via NF-kB)
- Upregulation in telomere maintenance and cardiac muscle contraction in long term meditators
- 3 month meditation retreat: meditation increased telomerase activity (Jacobs, 2011)

Effect on others...

European Study (Grepmaier et al, 2007)

- 18 therapists-in-training were randomly assigned to two groups to learn Zen meditation or to wait-list controls
- they continued giving standard treatment
- patients of the Zen trained therapists-in-training had better patient outcomes

Study of 70 Primary Care MDs

(Krasner et al, 2009)

- 8 weeks of CMEs that included MBSR, self-awareness, didactic and discussion
- Significant improvement in mindfulness, self-awareness, compassion, empathy, emotional stability and decrease in burnout
- Most effect still present at 15 month follow-up

Another selected slide from 10/2/2013 DBR in-service presentation “Selected Highlights of Harvard Seminar: **The New Science of Resiliency and its Clinical Applications**, Boston, September 17-20, 2013

Alan Logan, ND

Importance of Greenspace



- Faster healing
- Decreases pain
- Improved cognition
- Decreases stress
- Highest greenspace close to home → lowest disease states
- Michigan HS with green space higher academic performance and greater likelihood of going on to higher education
- 20 min guided greenspace walk as effective as meds in ADHD
- Shirin-Yokn → Japanese Forest Bathing
- Phytoncides from trees (that we breathe in) seem to have anticancer effects

Meditations (lots of apps)

- o Breathing meditations
 - o Mindfulness meditations
 - o Focused meditations (candle, prayer beads, rosary, mantra/ mudra...)
 - o Body scan/ progressive muscle relaxation
 - o Moving meditations (walking meditations, authentic movement, yoga dance, sweat your prayers, shake your soul...)
 - o Guided/ guided imagery meditations
- (→ Please be aware of your own comfort level with the intention and language in any meditations you engage)

God and your brain...

How God Changes Your Brain,

Andrew Newberg, MD and Mark Robert Waldman (2009)

Looking at neuroscience, religion, and spirituality, this research correlates brain health (via neuroimaging of brain circuitry and functioning) with spiritual experiences

o Top 8 practices that contribute to brain health and wellbeing:

- o Faith
- o Deep connection
- o Physical exercise
- o Meditation
- o Yawning
- o Conscious relaxation
- o Intellectual activity
- o Smiling

Spirituality and religion...

- ∞ Maybe it's both/ and....
- ∞ Spirituality: meaning, purpose, sacred
- ∞ Religion: philosophy, dogma, community, rituals, cultural norms, common paradigms

Spirituality and atheism...

- ∞ “Tell me about the ‘God’ you don’t believe in, I probably don’t believe in that god either.” (attr to R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi)
- ∞ Maybe it is not whether we believe in God, but more a question of which gods we serve... (what talk does your walk reflect?)

Different religions (my take...)

- Monotheistic religions
 - Abrahamic religions (how many in 1: 1, 3, 99+?)
- Polytheistic religions
 - e.g. Hinduism (one elephant?)
- Pantheism vs panentheism (Fr. Thomas Keating)
 - Everything is God vs God in everything
- Non-theistic religions
 - e.g. Buddhism, Daoism (descriptions of reality?)
- Mystics in every religion (? "...all speak the same language" L. Dossey)

A few of many spiritual practices/ meditations
(in Judaism and Christianity)

o Jewish

- o Prayers (liturgical and personal)
- o Study
- o Rituals/ rhythms of the sacred calendar
- o Devotion/ joy/ connections in nature (R. Nachman)

o Christian

- o Prayers (liturgical chanting, personal)
- o Centering prayer (Fr. Thomas Keating)
- o Lectio Divina
- o Examen

*Buddhist Tantra: Teachings and Practices for Touching
Enlightenment With the Body*
(Reginald Ray, Sounds True, 2003)

o Four Philosophical Pillars

- 1) This life is precious
- 2) Death is real
- 3) Karma is true (actions have effects)
- 4) Comforts and striving are “false”

o Characteristics of Buddha Nature

- Clarity
- Compassion
- Power

“There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself....”

[this inner work is important to understand your worth and who you are as a holy child of God so that you are not a puppet of others' projections and agendas]

~ Rev. Howard Thurman*

* (Thurman was an African American Baptist preacher, mystic, theologian, author, philosopher, civil rights activist and mentor to others, including MLK Jr. and R. Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.) This quote is in Howard Thurman's *Deep is the Hunger* from "Listening for the Sound of the Genuine: The Enduring Wisdom of Howard Thurman," Lerita Coleman Brown, SDI Webinar Learning Series, February 2023, <https://www.sdicompanions.org/courses/listening-for-the-sound-of-the-genuine/>

What to do?

- o Practice awareness (as you can, not as you can't)
- o Know your preciousness, your worth
- o Listen for the genuine* within you – the aligned awareness that connects knowing heart, thinking mind, and feeling body
- o Qualities by which you can recognize deep soul connection: Clarity, Compassion, and Power/ Strength
- o If you do not feel at peace – pray, ask for help, ask for insight/ direction
- o And keep your eyes open!