

STEP TEN: MEDITATION

Most of us think that meditation is part of Step Eleven, and of course it is. But there is also a form of meditation we can practice which is more closely linked to Step Ten. This kind of meditation, when done frequently, can gradually become a natural part of our everyday practice of Step Ten. For Step Ten is to be done constantly -- or at least that is the goal. And Step Ten meditation practice is a very helpful way of moving ourselves further towards that goal.

Let us begin with meditation as most of us understand Step Eleven meditation. We find a quiet place and sit comfortably, in some position which we can sustain without moving for the duration of the meditation period. Then we focus on something fixed: a candle flame, our breathing, a verse from the Bible. Our practice is a) to remain focused on this object as much as we can; b) when we realize we have become distracted, to return our attention to the object we chose to focus on.

Step Ten meditation is almost the reverse of this. In Step Ten meditation, we need not be in any quiet place (though it is useful to practice Step Ten meditation in such a location at least some of the time). And in Step Ten meditation, instead of focusing our attention on one object and bringing our full awareness to that object alone, we do the opposite: We shift our full attention to whatever we may suddenly have become aware of, and "note" what it is that we are doing.

Let us begin with Step Ten meditation in a quiet place, and then move on to its practice elsewhere.

We find a reasonably quiet place and sit comfortably. We then choose something on which we can place our primary focus if our attention is not engaged elsewhere -- say, the rising and falling of the stomach as we inhale and exhale. This area of primary focus is the place we "fall back" on if we find we are momentarily aware of nothing else.

We focus, then, on the rising and falling of our stomachs, noting the fact by saying to ourselves, "Rising, falling." Then we hear a sound, and our attention is drawn to it. We say to ourselves, "Listening, listening," for as long as our awareness is placed on that sound. Then we may find ourselves thinking that the noise may be the central heating switching on. We say to ourselves, "Thinking, thinking," for as long as our attention is on the thought. Then we may be aware of the moving of a current of air on our skin as the heating fan switches on. We say to ourselves, "Feeling, feeling," for as long as we remain aware of the movement of air on our skin. Then we may be aware

of the fact that our attention is presently engaged by nothing at all, so we return to our primary focus, that of the rising and falling of our stomachs as we breathe, meanwhile saying to ourselves, "Rising, falling." Fairly soon our attention goes elsewhere: Have we remembered to change the filter on the central heating unit? "Thinking, thinking" And so on, for the period of our meditation.

We find that this is, as we said above, almost the opposite of the more usual form of meditation. Instead of directing our attention to our primary focus and making ourselves aware of that primary focus over and over again, we follow instead the wanderings of our awareness, focusing our attention deliberately on whatever we become aware of and noting it to ourselves at the same time -- "Seeing, seeing; thinking, thinking; feeling, feeling."

Why might it be that no less a figure than the Buddha is reported to have said that, while focused meditation brings peace, this other form of meditation -- Step Ten-based meditation -- brings insight and enlightenment?

Perhaps the reason is this: Step Ten meditation helps us to become aware of our every interaction with the realities of the world we live in. It is, in fact, about living completely in the moment -- being aware of and naming each thought that passes through our brain, each stimulus we receive from the so-called "outside world." If we try Step Ten meditation, we discover that it almost compels us to live in the moment. Provided we note and name each different focus of our awareness, we cannot help but be in the moment. Even if, during Step Ten meditation, we start thinking about tomorrow or about what happened to us ten years ago, the accompanying act of noting and "naming" what we are doing *while we are in the act of doing it* ("Thinking, thinking") reminds us that we are thinking *here and now*, not tomorrow or ten years ago.

There is another great advantage to Step Ten meditation, and that is that it can be practiced anywhere and at any time. While it is good practice to do Step Ten meditation in a quiet place, it can -- unlike Step Eleven meditation -- be done while we are driving a car, sitting in a business meeting talking about our company's strategic goals, riding a roller-coaster, or running a marathon. In short, *there is no place or time where it is impossible to practice Step Ten-based meditation.*

The Sermon on the Mount, preached by Jesus and recorded in Matthew's Gospel (with an alternative version, the Sermon on the Plain in Luke's Gospel), consists to a significant extent of recommendations to practice Step Ten meditation. Take no thought for the morrow, says Jesus. Don't worry about what you are going to eat or what you are going to wear, for wherever

your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And in Step Ten meditation, we are treasuring what is happening here and now. If we do start to worry about tomorrow, or about what we are going to eat or wear, at least we are aware that we are worrying here and now. And we note it to ourselves: "Thinking, thinking."

When we begin practicing Step Ten meditation regularly, we are sometimes tempted to wonder what the difference is between Step Ten-based meditation and the "usual" practice of Step Ten as outlined at the beginning of this booklet. And the answer is, of course, that *there is no difference at all*. Step Ten-based meditation *is* precisely the practice of Step Ten -- no more and no less. Step Ten meditation simply takes the basic practice of Step Ten and turns it into a discipline -- a discipline we practice quietly when we can, and each moment of the day as we go about our so-called everyday lives. In short, Step Ten meditation *is* Step Ten. And that is the best reason for cultivating it as a meditation practice.