

## Questions and Answers

**A selection of questions and answers over the years from John's classes, workshops, and e-mails. These may be informative regardless of training with John or his Teachers. Please see available books and other web sites for greater depth and more information. View expressed below are John's and may not accurately express his Teachers methods or explanations.**

### Meditation

{This query was a part of a longer conversation with a client in a consultation session, at a small weekend workshop. the Individual was highly motivated by 'gain' with strong personal opinions on spirituality. Like many of us he found it hard to relax, or practice something that didn't have a concrete goal with definite personal rewards in an allotted time. }

#### **1. Why Meditate?**

Why not.

*I mean what's the purpose?*

No 'purpose' as you are thinking of.

*What will I gain?*

Gain? Absolutely nothing, well not anything you right now would value.

*I don't understand!*

Not understanding- that's a great reason to meditate!

*Im confused! In fact this whole day has left me feeling confused!*

Confusion. Now that's another great reason to meditate!

*OK. How long will it take to get anything from it?*

How long have you got.

## ***2. Can mediation help you relax.***

Sure, but wiser to consider the truth that relaxation will help you meditate. First learn how to do that well, Yoga for instance primary goal is to prepare one for meditation, not to look good in a leotard! 'Tame the body then tame the mind' is Yoga's method simply put.

Meditation and relaxation, or even meditation and contemplation, are not the same thing. Many confuse them, as I did, everything thrown in together like some delicious 'spiritual soup'- lots of ingredients but with no discernible pieces that are individually identifiable. Many groups say they're doing meditation but its simply relaxation techniques done while sitting. Not saying that's not useful, but its not meditation. Meditation is about coming to terms and being at peace with the complexities of human life and experince, either in the context of a established religious context, or on ones own terms. Its not always a relaxing experince particularly when attempting resolution or at least coming to terms with difficult personal issues. Neither the meditations of Jesus or Buddha were easy, both went through a lot of suffering to reach their 'goals' of understanding. People want a good feel factor obviously, and don't often want to consider that meditation could make them feel very uncomfortable before it brings rewards such as peace.

## ***3. Can mediation help you resolve personal problems.***

It can certainly help understand the nature of them, it takes a huge effort to resolve them. As my Yoga Teacher said 'problem solving is one of our biggest problems'. Some problems are unresolvable and we just have to learn to relax and live with being imperfect. We all can feel frustrated by events that we don't like, we can all get jealous, angry, upset, etc for reasons we'd realistically prefer not to. The world and personal stage is full of the repercussions of petty feuding based on such emotions. For instance the traditional Judaeo-Christian seven deadly sins or 'drawbacks in personal development' {I like to call them} are pointers on how to make life flow easier. Its just hasn't been marketed in that way, rather just an extension of guilt.

Understanding why we all suffer and how suffering arises {from a buddhist perspective that's because of attachment, self importance and separation, and desire for permanence} on a personal basis certainly can help many of us navigate daily life.

That's why I do it. Without it many feel swamped by our mere finite frail imperfect humanity, and the all worlds crazy's and craziness.

#### **4. Can mediation make you enlightened?**

Many have done in this pursuit, but I have idea- as I'm not! Historically and traditionally yes its a method to achieve that lofty ideal. Some of my teachers are probably as close as possible to that achievement, but even they admit their not. Beware those who say they are. Old Zen saying-'If you meet the Buddha on the road-Kill him!' This points to the internal journey and the aspect in ourselves of our ego that would think we were 'buddha like', but also points to meeting such an individual they could not be a buddha if they seemed to be one to our unenlightened state. A truly enlightened being wouldn't even be recognisable to us. 'Kill' note here means 'kill' 'eliminate' 'cease' 'cut off' not literally kill. It points us to 'understand' the 'desire' in ourselves of our ego's want to be Buddha's or want we believe that state to be. In the end even that is just all attachment and futile misplaced longing. Yep I know its a real mind twizzle. To want to be something but having to let go of that want, because it is only without it is there a possibility of arriving there.

#### **5. What's the simplest meditation?**

No idea- haven found it yet!

Just sitting and being at peace with everything you are and the world is- warts and all. Trouble is that's virtually impossible. Forgiving yourself and others fully for perceived wrongs, being settled within the imperfection of life, releasing the burden of broken dreams, all the things that adults can carry around indefinitely. A lot more too, through understanding, extending compassion, and asking for absolutely nothing in return. Its both very revealing, rewarding, infuriating and tremendous hard work! ;-}

**6. Sure just sitting around meditating is just a cop out. Must be easy getting all OM'ed with the world, what about all the things going wrong out there! I can't see how it would help me. Nothing personal sorry.**

Oh I like that getting all OM'ed! Brilliant!

No prob I don't take it personally.

I felt that way a lot, especially in the past, even after a few years of meditating. I got really angry with everything and everyone. Its quite healthy to be sceptical. The Buddha like many advanced beings recommended that not to take his word for anything he said but to try it out, to experiment.

I think all sane adults have to do that, and accept they might not find it an easy particularly palatable path.

Of course a lot of people do use meditation as an avoidance strategy, in fact its one of the hurdles that all meditators will come up against in their practice. Two choices stay attached to being disconnected to the world in your own little bubble, and realise you are no better than someone drowning their sorrows with booze, or engage with the world warts and all and see if you can still maintain centred and meditatively relaxed and at peace. Its an age old prob. From the adept who leaves his retreat thinking he has it, re-enters society caves under the pressure, freaks out , and soon runs back to either advance or accept defeat, to the monks in tokyo who have to meditate on the cross roads in busy traffic to show they really have attained inner peace in even a most drab,hectic,noisy and unserene situation.

As my teacher shiv talked about how the attitude of an inmate in a prison can either make a cell a pit of despair, a living hell, or a holy temple. We all have that choice wherever we live on how we live. I've known people who freak out and go nuts, with lovely houses, money and friends. Its all about the individuals experience and the work they do with their consciousness.

***7. Stillness sounds nice, and peace and loving kindness etc. But I just have so much in my head. Fears, resentments, anger at my parents, the world, I cant see how to escape all that!***

We cant escape, that's the point, we have to learn to be with it and resolve it as best as possible. The practices of making the body physically more resilient are part of any ones training to deal with the aspects of life we don't like and cant change. Then gradually we learn to transform our feelings to others even if there feelings towards us don't change, or possibly become worse. That's not easy, it doesn't come in a day, hence the hard work over many years. I'm still doing that kind of effort. Meditation is not a quick fix method. Its a development of character over time.

***8. How much or often do you meditate?***

As often as possible. I find myself investigating most if not all my experiences on a daily basis while working, doing chores, eating etc. Being aware as much as possible while awake simply. Its not something I planned, it just is part of the landscape of this kind of endeavour as one evolves with it. This includes sitting down and just 'doing' meditation at least once a day.

Mindfulness and observing the way we influence and are in turn influenced is intense and not occasionally bewildering, as you get older its more on the level of purely humbling. Compared with a master though im about as aware as as piece of cardboard!

What I think is best is start with a few mins a day, building gradually a regular practice. Don't beat yourself up if you feel its an imperfect practice or if you seem to get nowhere. No ones is, even the Buddha said this. Perfection and the hunt for it is a massive problem and accepting being human warts and all, even as a saint, is the gentlest, sanest option!

Ideally attend meditation classes where you can get support in your practice. The serene atmosphere of meditating with others in mutual support is really beneficial especially when the going gets tough. Its the premise behind monastery life.