

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
Online Worship Service
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Walking as a Spiritual Discipline

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Chalice Words & Lighting

“Coming Home” by Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

In our lives, there are those places that we return to in joy and in sorrow. They are places that give us grounding when the ground seems to have fallen out from under us. They are places that carry our spirit when we are least able to carry it ourselves. They are places where the lilt of laughter, the touch of a hand, a warm hug, a knowing glance steady us in the midst of the unexpected. They are places that call you to keep growing into life even at the end of life. A place of comfort that gives you the courage to ask the deep questions, and to act in such a way, that at the beginning, middle or end of life, *your life's outcomes* are worthy of your life. May this place, this community, this congregation be such a place. A place of both challenge and contentment. A place where, upon arriving for the first time and the last, you can say, “I am home.”

All Souls Ritual of Remembrance

“Sharing Our Loss” by Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Loss is an ageless occurrence of life. It can come at any time: as children, as young adults, as middle agers, as older agers. The loss of a loved one on four legs (or more or none) can be just as difficult as the loss of a loved one with two legs. It all depends on the depth & mutuality of that love.

Loss also comes in the many kinds of change we experience, expected or unexpected. Each kind of profound loss effects who we are in the moment. Maybe not forever, but for a time, to be sure.

Sharing the names and memories of our loved ones, is one way we can share the burden of loss, and thereby heal . . . together.

So may it be.

Reflection “Walking as a Spiritual Discipline”

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

I ask that you answer for yourself, these questions. Do you have experience in the practice of meditation? Do you do it regularly, say three times a week? Do you do it

once in a while? Did you try it once, but found it too hard to do? Have you been unable to figure out a reason to do it?

I have to admit that there was a time when the idea of practicing a spiritual discipline sounded too hard, like too much work. I had things to do! Goals to accomplish! People to take care of! Sitting or walking without purpose – what’s that all about? I mean, really!

But, slowly I’ve learned some things along the way and I have greater clarity about why most any kind of meditation, (when faithfully practiced) can be helpful to your spirit.

Let’s start first with an insight offered by Diana Eck, author of **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras**.¹ She says,

Most of the time the mind is quite unstable, its attention moving from one thing to another on the free wind of association. Hindus compare it to a pack of monkeys, bumping through our consciousness, yanking in one thought after another . . . ‘Eastern Orthodox mystics like Gregory of Sinai speak of the mind’s ‘habit of turning and wandering hither and thither.’ Joseph Goldstein, an American Buddhist teacher says, ‘The mind has no shame. It will hop on the train of association and will allow itself to be taken ‘most anywhere.’ How true it is; whether in meditation or in [our] daily . . . activit[ies], the mind often has a way of going about its business quite independently [of us]. [As though it were separate from us] [t]hinking, judging, meandering through the past, imagining the future, swinging like a pendulum between past and future without resting in the present.

Now, how many of you just wandered off for a moment?

Have any of you ever experienced this kind of distraction? Did you think you were the only one with such a roving mind? So what does it matter? Not much, if you’re looking to skim across the surface of life, unaware of who you are and how you relate to this world. But, if you are interested in deepening your spiritual life, then you might want to pay attention.

And, by that, I don’t mean, ‘pay attention to me’ (though it wouldn’t hurt). I mean, pay attention! Eck shares these thoughts starting with the one-word sentence: “Attention!”

Attention! It is a word I associated for many years with the barking command of a military officer, a sports coach, or a school principal

¹ Eck, Diana. **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 147.

[speaking] over the loudspeaker. Attention. Pay attention. May I have your attention please. Attention, class . . . On my grade school report cards under the head[ing] 'Desirable Habits and Attitudes' there was a box for 'Pays Attention' in which I always got an S for 'Satisfactory.'² She goes on to say, "[just] being awake, alert, attentive [to life] is no easy matter . . . it is the greatest spiritual challenge we face . . . [the only one].³

PAUSE

The only spiritual challenge we face . . . paying attention? That seems a tall order, a bit presumptive. The only one?

PAUSE

To answer that question, I turn to my colleague and former minister, Rev. Josh Pawelek, at the UU Society in Manchester. See if his thoughts about spirituality resonate for you . . . he says,

For me, spirituality is fundamentally about connection. An effective spiritual practice connects us to some reality larger than ourselves: family, humanity, nature, the land, life, the planet, the cosmos, spirit, divinity, the gods and goddesses, [. . .] the ancestors [we celebrate and mourn]. [To contemplate one's spiritual life is to discover and uncover that which] is of utmost worth to us, what we hold sacred and regard as holy.⁴

PAUSE

What I suggest to you then is that anything that interferes with your capacity to hone in on yourself, to know yourself, to understand yourself, to name for yourself that which matters most to you; . . . anything that interferes with your connection to your own life and your connection to others; . . . anything that stands in the way of naming the altar upon which you would willingly place your life; . . . that thing is an obstacle to your spiritual health, your spiritual quests, your spirit's development.

PAUSE

² Eck, Diana. **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 144.

³ Eck, Diana. **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 145.

⁴ Pawelek, Josh, Rev. "On Setting Out and Coming Home." Church of the Larger Fellowship Newsletter: **Quest**, Vol LXX, No. 10, November 2015, page 1.

And, just as important as naming the obstacles is to name the objective of meditation and contemplative practices and that is . . . to know yourself, to know what feeds you spiritually, and, to know how you intend to leave a qualitative difference for those you care about, and the world. All this knowing comes from a disciplined mind, a contemplative mind, one that is deeply in touch with one's self, available, ready, and paying attention to the present, for the present is all we have.

Eck would suggest that the purpose of meditation is to cage up the monkeys and cultivate instead a contemplative mind. Cain Carroll, who wrote, "**The Four Dignities: The Spiritual Practice of Walking, Standing, Sitting and Lying Down**" says,

The purpose of contemplation is to see things in a fresh way.⁵ It is the art of contemplation that allows us to calm down. In the presence of a calm spirit, we gain perspective, see the bigger picture, and make wiser decisions in other parts of our life. [Contemplation allows us] . . . to take ideas in fully, [to] digest them slowly. There is no rush. We do not have to accept or reject. We do not have to label 'good' or 'bad.' [In contemplation], [t]here is another option beyond the duality of choosing this or that. We can simply [breathe and] remain open. The [practice] of contemplation [allows us to observe] our own beliefs [weighing them for whether they fit our perceived view of the world]. The objective is not to acquire a host of new ideas per se, but to find out if the ones we hold dear have any relationship with reality.⁶ (emphasis added)

And, so, I bring you back to Diana Eck's statement that "[the only spiritual challenge we face is that of paying attention]."⁷

I submit to you that of all the distractions in our lives: jobs, lists, the Internet, TV, smartphones, Facebook, Twitter, Instagrams, political debates, destructive leaders, global crises, . . . of all these distractions, the distraction that supersedes all the others are the monkeys of our mind "[hopping on the train of association, taking us hither and yon]"⁸ leading us away from a robust and resilient inner spiritual life, leading us away from balanced health and wholeness, distracting us from cultivating spiritual practices that would *otherwise* sustain us in the best and worst of times.

⁵ Carroll, Cain. **The Four Dignities: The Spiritual Practice of Walking, Standing, Sitting and Lying Down** (London & Philadelphia: Singing Dragon, 2014) 3.

⁶ Carroll, Cain. **The Four Dignities: The Spiritual Practice of Walking, Standing, Sitting and Lying Down** (London & Philadelphia: Singing Dragon, 2014) 3.

⁷ Eck, Diana. **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 145.

⁸ Eck, Diana. **Encountering God, A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 145.

PAUSE

Now you might ask, but, isn't meditation hard, whether walking or sitting? How do we walk or sit without purpose?

I am reminded of a quote that I think applies especially to these days. It is by André Gide and goes like this: *"One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."*⁹ Aren't we in that place right now? We are searching for new lands, and we haven't seen the shore for a very long time.

What better time to examine the distractions that are getting in our way of finding that new land?

Don't get me wrong! Distraction has its purpose. Though it may not always be a good one. It allows us to believe that we are engaged with the world, doing things, accomplishing things. It allows us to believe we are in charge, in control. Look how much I have done this day! This week! This month! In my life! Just look! Look at all the ways I respond to the many things demanding my presence and the hours of my life! And, when asked, "is this what you really want, is this what matters to you most?" Do we find the question incomprehensible? Do we respond, saying, "What does that mean? What do you mean? How do I know what I want most in life? I have all these things, these distractions to take care of . . ."

This is where the regular practice of meditation comes in . . . to help calm the monkeys of your mind so that you can wrest control of your life away from them.

PAUSE

There are many kinds of meditation. Today, I'm focusing on walking meditation and sitting meditation. Other kinds include . . . Standing Meditation and Lying Down Meditation. I'd like to think there is bicycling meditation ;-). However, expressed, they are all merely methods to accomplish not the act of meditating, but moments of contemplation, of being purely present to yourself, to one's spirit, by simply paying attention to the moment.

Walking Meditation

In these times when so many of us have taken up regular walking in an effort to control those hyperactive monkeys of the mind, it is important to know that there is more than

⁹ Pawelek, Josh, Rev. *"On Setting Out and Coming Home."* Church of the Larger Fellowship Newsletter: **Quest**, Vol LXX, No. 10, November 2015, page 1.

one way to walk, and that some kinds of walking can be more helpful to calming the soul than others.

M. Renée Miller says,

Meditative walking is as much a part of spiritual discipline as is sitting meditation. In many Buddhist communities . . . sitting meditation is followed by walking meditation . . . Meditative walking involves mindful attention to each step taken, to the in-breath and the out-breath, . . . and to a mantra or prayer that can be used as one walks. Meditative walking is usually done slowly with no particular destination in mind. It is walking in order to walk . . . [It is a] time of union with [a sustaining Spirit]. . . [Oft times it is conducted in a labyrinth which provides] a confined area in which to walk mindfully. [That's what's special about a labyrinth.] [They hold the pilgrim in security.] [T]here is no fear of getting lost. [You don't have to know where you're going.] Once [you] start on the path, and put one foot in front of the other, [you] will end up in the center and come back out again to [your] starting place . . .

[That said, meditative walking can be done anywhere.] It can be done in your living room, in a parking lot, down a country lane, through the bustle of a city. What it requires is not a particular place, but a settling of the soul into the activity. It is a practice of mindfulness that trains the [mind] to rest [even] in the [midst] . . . [of activity].”¹⁰

Sounds easy, doesn't it?

But, she continues,

what's easy is to walk too fast, or try too hard to 'get somewhere', hurrying up to complete the journey. Or we may find ourselves turning into a quasi-naturalist – focusing on the landscape or people around us to help cure our boredom or lack of attention on [the Spirit within]. . . We may find ourselves thinking, planning, or strategizing our life [controlled by the monkeys again]. For this reason, it's good to have a short prayer [or mantra] that can be said with each step and breath to help [us] focus [on the Spirit within].¹¹

¹⁰ M. Renée Miller. “A Guide to Spiritual Practice”, A CREDO Resource, Copyright c 2010 by CREDO Institute, Inc.
http://episcopalcredo.org/CREDO2/assets/File/GUIDE_to_Spiritual_Practice_Reading_Practice.pdf October 31, 2015

¹¹ M. Renée Miller. “A Guide to Spiritual Practice”, A CREDO Resource, Copyright c 2010 by CREDO Institute, Inc.

For me, that prayer is a simple one, meaningful no doubt only to me. It is: “Seek joy, make joy. With each step, seek joy, make joy. Breathing in, seek joy; breathing out, make joy. Left foot, seek joy; right foot, make joy. Such practice puts the monkeys at bay, calms the spirit and allows you to pay attention to the present.

Sitting Meditation

Now, lest some of you say, “walking is hard for me” so I can’t do it. Sitting meditation is just as good a method of contemplation as walking meditation. You can even use a chair if you want, instead of the floor. In sitting meditation as in walking meditation, we can make “. . . a graceful transition from doing [. . .] to Being.”¹²

You can read books about the sitting techniques of meditating. Or, you can just sit and find out what is comfortable that doesn’t put you to sleep! The hardest part is to actually sit down, and I don’t mean just because your knees may creak and your back is stiff. You know what I mean, to sit down without a purpose to accomplish some task or read a book or watch a show. Just to sit, just to contemplate the spirit within, just to be at one with your spirit. The monkeys want their way with you. Will you give in to them in the coming days, weeks and months?

Sometime later today or in the coming week, I invite you to find a spot to sit in silence for as long as you can. If you need to borrow my mantra to keep the monkeys at bay, you are welcome to do so. “Seek joy, make joy.”

Or use your own mantra. Breathe in, breath out, say a word or two to focus your mind. If a monkey interferes, just start again.

In the meantime, let us sing together, Hymn 352, “Find a Stillness.”

<https://youtu.be/l0ojl6kVCv4>

So may it be.

http://episcopalcredo.org/CREDO2/assets/File/GUIDE_to_Spiritual_Practice_Reading_Practice.pdf October 31, 2015

¹² Carroll, Cain. **The Four Dignities: The Spiritual Practice of Walking, Standing, Sitting and Lying Down** (London & Philadelphia: Singing Dragon, 2014) 93.