

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

May 2008

Achieving Calmness and Personal Insight through Meditation

By Debbie McGuinn

We were fortunate to have Rose Scott as our speaker at our April 21st meeting, which drew a large crowd. Rose, who was introduced by Julia Holz, is a meditator, trainer, facilitator and psychotherapist specializing in marital and family counseling. Through twenty years of her profession she has been enriched as person and a searcher, and a gift received along the journey was to learn a wonderful meditation technique that has become an integral part of her life.

Rose spoke to us about meditation, specifically the Vipassana Meditation method. She explained how after working for many years with children who had been abused, addicts young and old with their families under a lot of stress, she admits she was affected and was emotionally drained. She was also experiencing stress in her own personal life while dealing with her husband's temper.

So she took some time off and tried all kinds of alternative ways to get back in touch with her inner self and regain her energy, such as yoga, tai-chi, quigong, and free-body movement in nature (with an Indonesian teacher for several years). As a therapist and searcher she explored these Eastern



Left to right: Maru Quindimil, Julia Holz, and Rose Scott

methods of healing and therapy by actually experiencing them for herself. She attended workshops and read books, one of which she mentioned was called "From Medication to Meditation" by Osho.

The book was very interesting and relevant to her work with mental health. She realized that meditation

was something to be practiced and not just read. This made her more curious and planted the desire to learn meditation in her heart.

One day a friend from her body movement group told her that the meditation course she took in India is now being offered here in the

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NEXT MWF MEETING ■ **When:** Monday, 2008 May 19, 6:30 p.m. **Where:** Sue Hooper's home, 4 Balete, South Forbes Park, Makati City. **What:** Dominique Lemay, founder and president of Virlanie Foundation, will speak about the current activities of this organization, which was awarded the Human Rights Prize from the French Republic in 2001 for the Foundation's valuable contribution to human rights through its work with disadvantaged children in the Philippines. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **June meeting:** Monday, 2008 June 16.

Meditation and Food

You, and your mind, are what you eat. Some people are discovering that their state of mind is affected by what they eat.

But then, it seems that yogis and meditators have already known this for thousands of years. They eat only foods that will affect their consciousness in a beneficial way. These kinds of food are called “sentient” food.

“Sentient” foods are believed to be good for both mind and body, help develop the inner life, enhance spiritual progress, and elevate, clarify, or sharpen the mind. They include most fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, legumes, dairy products, and vegetarian foods in general.

Another type of food is called “mutative.” They are believed to be good only for either the body or the mind, and should only be eaten in limited quantities by people who are meditating. They include caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee, some carbonated

drinks, and chocolate.

A third type of food is called “static.” They are harmful to the body or the mind, or both. Not only do they make you drowsy and make it difficult for you to meditate, they are also believed to make you dull, stagnate mentally, and vulnerable to disease. They include fish, eggs, meat, chicken, garlic, onion, mushrooms, strong spices in large quantities, as well as tobacco, alcohol, intoxicants, and other drugs.

For those practicing meditation, it is believed that it is best if you eat mostly “sentient” foods and some “mutative” foods in moderation. As you gradually progress in your practice of meditation, you can become more sensitive to the link between your physical health and your mental state. And that, in turn, will make it easier for you to make gradual changes in your eating habits. You might even become quite good at observing the effects that certain specific foods have on you.

On Meditation: Food for Thought

- Meditation may not be ideal for schizoid, dissociated, or overly narcissistic individuals. Those practitioners with good ego-strengths are likely to benefit the most.
- Meditation is as easy as worrying. In worrying one focuses on “self”: pain, isolation, loss, fear.... In meditation one surrenders “self” with faith, hope and love.
- When you “find perfection in imperfection” your meditation practice is enlightened. ~ Shunryu Suzuki in *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*
- Silence is exquisite. In the world of words, meditation and silence are synonymous.

Meditation and Silence

“When you were in the womb you were silent. Then you were born and began to talk, talk, talk—till the day you are laid in the tomb. Then you will once again be silent. Capture that silence which was there in the womb and will be there in the tomb and even now underlies this interval of noise called life. That silence is your deepest essence.”

~ Anthony de Mello in *One Minute Nonsense* (1992)

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Philippines. No doubt, as soon as she read the announcement of the ten-day meditation course, she knew this was a serious course. She attended the 10-day meditation retreat, which she said changed her life in how she reacts, or doesn’t react, to life’s daily pressures, including her husband’s temper. She has found it so beneficial, that she wanted to share her experience with others.

Rose gave us a little taste of meditation by having all of us concentrate on our breathing for 5 minutes. Five minutes of silence and pushing out thoughts that usually race through our minds was no easy task for some of us. But in those moments of only being aware of one’s breath, one feels calm. This was only a small example of what can be achieved through devoted meditation.

The Vipassana Meditation method is a technical, scientific “how to” way of meditating. It teaches a person to deal with the mind by observing sensations that a person experiences (aversion, craving, ignorance), and to ‘move them away’ to a point where the person who is the observer will learn how not to just react automatically.

Vipassana (which literally means, ‘seeing things as they really are’) is a simple and systematic method of quieting and sharpening the mind through direct self-observation. This enables one to face the tensions and problems of daily life in a calm, peaceful and balanced way.

According to Rose, the main purpose of the meditation technique is to purify the mind of negativities and defilements. In the process it has also helped people deal with mental pain such as anger and depression and other physical health problems. Although she still reacts to things, and gets frustrated and angry as well, the reactions don’t last as long as in the past. She has learned that venting anger and lashing out affects the person negatively, as well as the others around her.

Rose explained that there is an alternative to acting out anger and suppressing it. By observing it through one’s breath and body sensations, one can gain some control over how one will respond. It may sound like it is easier said than done, but it is actually the function of the meditation training to reprogram the mind to get it used to observing rather than reacting.

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“Meditation : Self regulation of attention, in the service of self-inquiry, in the here and now.” We like that.

So what else is there about meditation? How is it done, what is its place in the day to day life of ordinary people? What about religion?



KaWoMeNaN

Selected and edited by
Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

All about Meditation

“Self regulation of attention, in the service of self-inquiry, in the here and now.”

Focus

Meditation techniques, we found, can be classified according to their focus. Techniques that focus on the field of background perception and experience are classified as “mindfulness” meditation. Those that focus on a preselected specific object are classified as “concentrative” meditation. And, there are techniques that shift in focus between the field and the object, classified as a combination of “mindfulness and concentration.”

Concentrative meditation

Concentrative meditation focuses the attention on the breath, an image, or a sound (mantra), in order to still the mind and allow a greater awareness and clarity to emerge.

The simplest form of concentrative meditation is to sit quietly and focus the attention on the breath.

Yoga and meditation practitioners believe there is a direct correlation between one’s breath and one’s state of the mind. For example, when a person is anxious, frightened, agitated, or distracted, the breath tends to get shallow, rapid, and

uneven. On the other hand, when the mind is calm, focused, and composed, the breath is slow, deep, and regular.

Focusing the mind on the continuous rhythm of inhalation and exhalation provides a natural object of meditation. As you focus your awareness on the breath, your mind becomes absorbed in the rhythm of inhalation and exhalation. As a result, your breathing will become slower and deeper, and the mind becomes more tranquil and aware.

Meditation and anxiety disorder

Meditation, together with other stress management techniques, can help people with anxiety disorders calm themselves. It may also enhance the effects of therapy.

Meditation and ADHD

Meditation, together with other stress management methods such as relaxation techniques and exercise, can be used by parents to increase their own tolerance for frustration so that they can respond more calmly to their child’s behavior.

Meditation and Hinduism

According to archaeologists, the practice of meditation existed among the first Indian civilisations. They cite Indian scriptures dating back 5,000 years that describe meditation techniques. In fact, it is widely believed that meditation originated from Vedic Hinduism, the oldest religion that professes meditation as a spiritual and religious practice.

There are different types of meditation in Hinduism. These include:

- * Vedanta, a form of Jnana Yoga.
- * Raja Yoga as outlined by Patanjali, which describes eight “limbs” of spiritual practices, half of which might be classified as meditation. Underlying them is the assumption that a yogi should still the fluctuations of his or her mind: Yoga cittavrtti nirodha.
- * Surat shabd yoga, or “sound and light meditation.”
- * Japa Yoga, in which a mantra is repeated aloud or silently.
- * Bhakti Yoga, the yoga of love and devotion, in which the seeker is

focused on an object of devotion; for example, Krishna.

* Hatha Yoga, in which postures and meditations are aimed at raising the spiritual energy, known as Kundalini, which rises through energy centres known as chakras.

Meditation and Buddhism

Meditation has always been central to Buddhism. The historical Buddha himself was said to have achieved enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree.

Most forms of Buddhism distinguish between two classes of meditation practices: shamatha and vipassana, both of which are necessary for attaining enlightenment. The former consists of practices aimed at developing the ability to focus the attention single-pointedly; the latter includes practices aimed at developing insight and wisdom through seeing the true nature of reality.

Meditation and Islam

Meditation is the core of Muslim mystical traditions, where meditative quiescence is believed to have a quality of healing and creativity. The Muslim prophet Muhammad himself spent long periods in meditation and contemplation, and it was during one such period that he began to receive the revelations of the Qur’an.

There are two concepts or schools of meditation in Islam:

- * Tafakkur and Tadabbur, literally meaning reflection upon the universe.
- * Sufi meditation, also known as Muraqaba or Tamarkoz—a Persian term referring to the “concentration of abilities.” Consequently, the term concentration is synonymous to close attention, convergent, collection, compaction, and consolidation.

Meditation and Christianity

Christian traditions have various practices which can be identified as forms of meditation. The rosary, for example, or the Adoration (focusing on the eucharist) in Catholicism, or the hesychast tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy, are similar to forms of Eastern meditation that focus on an individual object.

Christian meditation is considered a form of prayer. And prayer as a form of meditation of the heart is described in the Philokalia—a practice that leads towards Theosis which ignores the senses and results in inner stillness.

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Rose also realized that meditation has helped her in her therapy with clients. She is more calm and less affected by stress as long as she continuously meditates and purifies her own mind. With a calmer and pure mind, wisdom naturally unfolds, thus making her more effective as a mental health professional. When one can get to the root of who one is, and is able to find a way to access the unconscious mind (where aversion and craving reside), then one naturally learns how to change destructive patterns such as impulsive physical or verbal violence, drug addiction, and relapse.

For Rose, this is very exciting since in the field of mental health this is very helpful to many who are suffering. She said she has gained much from it for herself. Learning how to deal with difficult feelings simply taught her to be happy and find meaning in each moment that life gives.

Rose herself attends the ten-day retreat every year now, no matter how busy she is with her four children, husband, and work obligations. She described the first three days of the course as difficult because we are not used to silence. When everything is silent outside and our mouth remains shut, the mind becomes very loud, noisy, and restless.

But then, the meditation practice slowly helps the mind settle down and then it is ready to be re-trained to work more positively for our benefit. Being silent for nine days could be the most intimate and loving moment one can have with oneself. She said that by the

time the participants are allowed to talk on the 10th day, many of them don't feel the need to; they are very at peace with the silence and appreciate the calm.

Retreats, which last ten days, are scheduled to teach students the Vipassana Meditation method as taught by S.N. Goenka and his assistant teachers in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. The next one is coming up on May 7 to 18, 2008 and it will be held at Sico Farm, Dasmariñas, Cavite. By tradition, Vipassana Meditation courses are made possible by voluntary contributions. Participants may contribute after they have completed the 10-day course.

Those who want to learn more about the Vipassana Meditation method or apply to attend the retreat may visit the website <http://www.dhamma.org>.

For inquiries, please call 895-3591, 639-3047, 695-1099; or text 0917-882-5541, 0917-800-4530; or fax 746-7134; or email vipassana_rp@yahoo.com or info@ph.dhamma.org. ■

In 1975, the Benedictine monk John Main introduced a form of meditation based on recitation of a prayer-phrase. The World Community for Christian Meditation describes Main's work as "teaching Christian meditation as part of the great work of our time of restoring the contemplative dimension of Christian faith in the life of the church."

The MWF Yahoo Group

needs a site moderator. The time commitment is about 1/2 hour each week. Lisa Stuart has been doing a wonderful job, but she is moving to Clark and won't be able to devote time to this endeavor. Please contact Shari Virjee Tañada at svirjee@gmail.com for more information.

Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Shari Virjee**, MWF Membership Message Board and Assistant Chair. **Cecilia Leung** and **Julia Holz**, Programs. **Lisa Stuart**, MWF Membership Message Board Moderator. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

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www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

MWF Newsletter
c/o Lisa Lumbao
26-B Casa Real Townhouse
Real St., Urdaneta Village
Makati City 1225