



The Practice of Meditation

My family loves the board game Risk. In the game, every player receives armies which are strategically placed on various countries. The goal is to take over the world. In the beginning of the game, my oldest son concentrates all his armies on 3 or 4 countries. From all appearances, he should never be a threat to anyone. The rest of the family, however, looks strong and powerful with their armies spread all over the world. But, after hours of play, my oldest son, who has marched out to conquer the world from a place of concentration, has the only army left standing; all the other player's armies have been conquered. Like the game of Risk, our lives are often spread all over and our minds are scattered in several directions. Spread thin, we can feel like we're being tossed around on a speeding roller coaster. We may look impressive, but how strong are we really to meet the challenges of the day? How little of an interruption does it take to knock us off balance?

Meditation is the ability to bring all of our scatteredness into one quiet, centered, focused place. In this gathering of ourselves, we begin to experience the power of concentration. And we begin to experience the unshakable strength that our lives can have. In the board game of Risk, this is how my oldest son always wins. In the game of life, this is how we become formidable players.

Yoga defines meditation as sustained concentration on an object. It is the ability to keep our mind focused for a period of time. We can get tripped up if we think this is easy. It's not. For us then, meditating becomes the practice of meditating, the practice of trying to bring our minds into a sustained focus. In the beginning, our ability to be still and focused may be broken and discontinuous, like drips of a leaky faucet. But as we practice over time, our ability to stay focused lengthens, and our concentration begins to look more like a steady stream pouring from that same faucet.

In the practice of meditation, we close our eyes to remove ourselves from outside sensory stimulation. When we draw inward from the senses, we find thoughts, sensations, and feelings arising from what we call the inner world, or the world of our unconscious. Meditation is the practice of watching the arising and falling of these thoughts, feelings, and sensations without the need to think, feel, or sense them. It is a stance of neutrality, rather than emotional involvement or interest. We call this the stance of the witness and it involves the ability to be non-attached to whatever arises in the moment without getting "hooked" on it. In Western culture, we want to analyze and fix things as they come into our awareness. In Yogic thought, the healing actually happens from the ability to witness whatever is arising without attachment. Meditation is a form of prayer in which we listen to the mystery that exists beyond what our minds can grasp. It gives us access to our creativity, intuition, and inner wisdom. One of the most damaging attitudes we can bring to meditation is that of expectation. Thinking meditation should look a certain way or cause a certain result can disappoint and discourage us. The practice of meditation requires trust; if we are sitting in the stillness inviting our minds to a focus, whatever is happening will probably not be what we expect or maybe want, but it will always be what we need.

Deborah Adele is an engaging, lively, and thought-provoking speaker who is not afraid to share stories from her own years of living and learning. She facilitates thoughtful and tangible ways of showing up to life in new ways, leaving participants with a dynamic combination of hope, inspiration, and practical knowledge. She is the author of *The Yamas & Niyamas: Exploring Yoga's Ethical Practice*, 2 CD's: *The Art of Relaxation* and *The Practice of Meditation* and authored a regular wellness column for the Duluth News Tribune.