

The Strengthening Aspects of Zen and Contemporary Meditation Practices

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Spiritual Growth with Entheogens – Psychoactive Sacramentals and Human Transformation

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Kathleen O'Shaughnessy has a thirty-year background in Soto Zen practice, psychosynthesis and gestalt therapy, movement as a means of expanding the capabilities of the human nervous system, the fragilities of nutritional healing, primary shamanic states (including plant-induced frames of mind), multiple and multilevel bodywork approaches to balance, and the practicalities of transpersonal crisis.

Meditation: Reflecting on Your Attitude toward Altered States

What is your relationship to unusual and altered states in meditation? As you read about these experiences, notice which ones touch you, notice where you are attracted or what reminds you of past experiences. How do you meet such experiences when they arise? Are you attached and proud of them? Do you keep trying to repeat them as a mark of your progress or success? Have you gotten stuck trying to make them return over and over again? How much wisdom have you brought to them? Are they a source of entanglement or a source of freedom for you? Do you sense them as beneficial and healing, or are they frightening? Just as you can misuse these states through attachment, you can also misuse them by avoiding them and trying to stop them. If this is the case, how could your meditation deepen if you opened to them? Let yourself sense the gifts they can bring, gifts of inspiration, new perspectives, insight, healing, or extraordinary faith. Be aware of what perspective and teaching you follow for guidance in these matters. If you feel a wise perspective is lacking, where could you find it? How could you best honor these realms and use them for your benefit?

Jack Kornfield, *A Path with Heart:*

*A Guide Through the Perils and
Promises of Spiritual Life*, 1993

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A spiritual practice and a visionary substance (Zen and LSD) came into my life within two weeks of each other. I lived in a part of the country where support for either was simply nonexistent. This had the effect of driving me into deeper relationship with each. I soon realized that Zen is LSD ... in slow motion. The same strata of mind are revealed. I began to think of consciousness as a bowl with a lid on it; no matter what tool is used to lift the lid (be it fasting, prayer, meditation, yoga, or entheogens), *the content of the bowl is the same*. Since I did not move in circles where sacramental substances were readily available, I became more and more

absorbed in the lone and demanding practice of “Zazen” – the sitting practice at the heart of Buddhism.

I readily saw that I had to bring my body into the picture as scaffolding for what was happening in my mind. I began teaching myself the mind/body systems of hatha yoga and Arica gym. *The practices themselves* became my teachers, for no teachers (or students for that matter) were available in the Deep South during those years. When I began reading Buddhist texts eleven years later, I could see that they described a map of where I had been rather than of where I was going. This is why I trust the nature of the practices so completely. Because of this particular style of learning, I tend to lift the practices out of their cultural or even specific spiritual contexts and teach them purely as process of mind. What happens in the spirit evolves of its own accord.

Then I began to see that at the center of the major religions is a core of individuals who do *a* practice. The common denominator of *all* these practices is that *mind is engaged with an activity of the body in this moment*. The Sufi Whirling dervish, the multi-chordal Tibetan chanter, the shaman amidst drum and rattle rhythms, the yogi at the out edges of posturing, the Christian in repetition of prayer, the primal tribal dances, the finite weavings of mind and breath in Buddhist meditation all contain that common theme of mind/body/now. When the moment called “now” is touched, everything expands and paradoxically begins to merge with the Large Space. With the realization of that common theme, I could then explore *multiple* spiritual practices and remain true to my purpose.

Each practice calls you to its center experience of balance ... a sweet and delicate equipoise. Once that equilibrium is experienced viscerally, it is mirrored into the emotions and the psyche. A deep yet flexible strength develops, which manifests in one’s interaction with the textures and energies of everyday life. This is primary experience – one without words or mind projections.

The mind is trained through meditation to see and experience finite detail, which in turn shifts the entire perceptual base of the nervous system. Life decisions and choices are now made from this broader base of perception. You quite simply see more clearly and in greater detail; thus action is taken according to the unique ingredients of individual situations. Rules are not necessary.

Consciousness converges with the self as a landing tern touches the outspread feet of its shadow on the sand: precisely, toe hits toe. The tern folds its wings to sit; its shadow dips and spreads over the sand to meet and cup its breast.

Annie Dillard
An American Childhood

Much later, and in the midst of my own transpersonal process, I began to work with Stan and Christina Grof for a span of several years, coordinating and facilitating in their month-long programs at Esalen Institute. I became intimately knowledgeable

regarding the beauties and perils of the transpersonal journey and how best to support it. I worked with LSD in a sheltered (some would say covert) way with self-selected individuals who were carrying terrifying layers in their psyche. These included second-generation holocaust survivors and people who were near death. Clearly, the substance was a healer. What I could also see clearly was that those who had had at least some meditation experience stood stronger in and gained more understanding from the sessions. I began to think of this focused training of the mind as an important adjunct and follow-up to the substance-expanded experiences and made the decision to teach it.

My own inner explorations at this point had turned toward the *visionary plants* exclusively when I became ill with Epstein-Barr virus. I had to give *all* of my energies to educating myself in nutritional healing and to maintaining enough physical strength to continue earning a living. I could no longer tolerate *any* chemical, mind-manifesting or otherwise, and I became allergic to all fungi. As my health improved over a seven-year period, I experienced the alchemical aspects of food – its effects on emotions, organ meridians, mental acuity, and physical energy. I could also sense that my guiding principles were funneling me exclusively toward the dimethyl-tryptamine-containing brews for personal ritual.

A botanist, Terence McKenna, pointed me down many avenues for understanding DMT. It rang true when he said that when we were a foraging species, testing the edibility of plants in untouched forests, we took DMT in through our diet and this was how the brain and nervous system developed. With the advent of agriculture, these plants disappeared from our diet, and the visionary aptitude of the human neocortex has yet to develop. That would seem to have been “the fall from The Garden” – the juncture at which man became separated from nature. Our evolutionary possibilities have been stunted.

With some of these ideas and this background, I began to reflect on the wisdom of a culture that could encourage strengthening of the mind and body through proven systems and substances, with which we can mark our development and life transitions.

1. The use of traditional spiritual practices to train ourselves as better observers with stronger bodies, enabling us to experience that visionary epicenter with more clarity and physical stability.
2. To return dimethyl-tryptamine to our diet. To plant DMT-containing plants in our gardens.
3. To homeopathically potentize DMT (or other mind-expanding substances) so they can be taken in unmeasurable, energetic doses on a regular basis. Homeopathic remedies are now potentized in multiple levels by a company in Germany, resulting in a product said to act as a harmonic in the body. Entheogens, managed in this way, could slide through laws and borders.
4. The use of diet as internal clearing, with emphasis on enzymes with a broad pH ratio, chlorophyll (these first two are very basic healing substances), life-enhancing foods, and traditional Chinese herbs.

5. To train in proven energetic practices such as Tai Chi, Chi Gong, the yogas, and an effective contemporary movement meditation form called "Continuum" that is designed to expand the capacity of the nervous system and brain.
6. To regularly ingest herbs or supplements such as ginkgo biloba, gotu kola, co-enzyme Q-10, and a co-enzymatic form of vitamin B6 called P5P (which I have found intensifies imaging in dreams and gives a crystalline quality to my thinking). A diet of bright green, without fat, salt, or chemicals. In short, biochemical enhancement to the ultimate.
7. To use entheogenic rituals at crucial junction points in life such as puberty, onset of adulthood, marriage, mid-life, and certainly in preparation for death.
8. And last, to use the sacramental collectively at important planetary events such as the solstice and equinox.

Who could ever tire of this heart-stopping transition? This deliberate emergence into a Place so broad that breath suspends and the inner eye squeezes in an effort to miss nothing of the streaming beauty. And to laugh and laugh at the irony of a life taken so seriously. Then to bring this visceral understanding and weave it finitely into the meat and potatoes level of everyday existence. Who could ever tire of it when the sum of these moments at the edge and in the presence of ourselves is the very best we have?

I begin my sixty-seventh year in April. I desire to live these years restored to the world of sacramental plants and to the family of people who have remained clean with them and true to them. It is important for me to remain in contact with a world that makes sense and for which I have great love, as I move toward my own final expansion.

Can we meet on this plane in a collective way called religion? Could we begin collectively to pave a morphogenic avenue? And, finally, from Sri Aurobindo:

Can we hope that this body, which is at present our means of terrestrial manifestation, will have the possibility of progressively transforming itself into something that will be able to express a higher life, or will we have to abandon this form totally in order to enter into another that does not yet exist upon the earth? Will there be continuity or will there be an abrupt appearance of something new? Will there be a progressive passage between what we are now and what our inner spirit aspires to become? Or will there be a break – in other words, will we be forced to abandon this present human form and wait for the appearance of a new form – an appearance whose process we do not foresee and which will have no relationship to what we are now?

And again, this question:

Will the human species be like certain other species that have vanished from the earth?