

Phenomenological Writing – Most Recent Experience

“Wee Hours Meditation”

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Context: I routinely sit and read in the evening for 3 to 4 hours before moving to the cushion at 9:00 pm for an hour of meditation before bed. On some occasions, however, I feel too sleepy for disciplined reading and find myself wanting to doze off early. I can resist this onset of sleep with some fire-breaths though sometimes I reluctantly give in to my body and do climb into bed. Last night was one such occurrence of the latter. I had just come back home after a busy week at the Fairy Congress, camping out in the fresh mountain air and being active all through the day and night. I could tell my body needed some catch-up rest so I did climb into bed instead of trying to read. Often when that happens I find myself awaking in the wee hours of the morning instead of slumbering straight on through to daybreak. I’ve learned to use this wee hours awakening as an opportunity to get up and meditate in the crystal clear stillness. The following is a phenomenological protocol of such a direct lived experience.

After I realize I’ve awoken, I try to assess the degree of wakefulness: May I return straightaway into the dream or am I liable to be awake for a while? Last night I felt sure it was the latter so I made sure to recall the dream from which I had just emerged so I would be able to remember it in the morning for recording in the dream journal. I raised my head to view the clock: It was 12:12: quite early and an excellent opportunity for a wee hours meditation. I lay there recalling the dream sequence: it was very pertinent: I was in a position at an institution of higher learning. I wanted to give a scholarship to a particularly accomplished athlete. I discussed this with an administrator who informed me that there was no specific scholarship set aside for this purpose yet the institution was managed in such a way that if I really wanted the scholarship the means could be found to make it happen. I realized then that I was the athlete and the scholarship was the funding to make it through my dissertation. The dream was reassuring for it suggested that the momentum of my funding was already being worked out on the astral plane, with details to be filtered down later. I looked again at the clock: 12:25. Yes, I’m going to get up and do a good meditation. After a trip to the loo, a peak outside to gauge the weather, and a cup of water with dissolved vitamin C, I arrived back at the meditation cushion to begin my practice: 12:30 am.

First: I assume ardha padmasana and then bend forward to touch my forehead to the ground. This always feels like an act of reverence, so sometimes I prolong the moment. Then I

re-verticalize my spine, place the blanket over my head and around my knees, and then prepare for meditation.

First comes Anapana: natural breathing through the nostrils looking for any sensations that might be occurring there. This is the relaxing movement: when it first begins the mind is quite scattered yet with each out-breath the mind becomes more tame. I always seem to be composing letters in my mind and this becomes quite apparent during the beginning of Anapana. Last night I was composing an ongoing letter to Mr. Bornzin, a former faculty advisor. After some time, the letter becomes unimportant. With continued attention on the breath and the sensations around the nostrils, the mind soon descends into stillness. Ahhh, this is serene. The mind recognizes this state. An EEG recording would show a shift in waveforms. Time slows down. I remember to keep my attention focused at the entrance to the nostrils, sensitive to any sensations that might be occurring there.

After some period of time, the attention moves quite spontaneously to the next stage of the meditation. I didn't plan it yet suddenly I notice that my attention is now focused at the point between the eyebrows. This is the meditation recommended in the Bhagavad Gita. When my attention arrives there I sense shimmering patterns, like an opening in the veil. Sometimes I see colors and shape-shifting geometric forms, effects similar to hallucinogenics. It's really quite enjoyable yet I've been cautioned not to heed these visuals: simply keep the attention focused at the point between the eyebrows and observe, dispassionately, without attachment.

The next stage requires a conscious choice, perhaps because it is so enjoyable to stay at the point between the eyebrows? At some point, however, I decide to raise my attention to the top of my head in an effort to locate Sahasrara chakra. This has become a very interesting experience: sometimes I visualize the 1000-petal lotus situated there; other times I sense Sahasrara slightly above my scalp. Sahasrara seems to be connected to a cosmic Source, as if it was a portal to still higher dimensions, perhaps to trans-somatic chakras? I often sense an effulgent light, silver in tone, at that Source. I can tap into that light and bring it down through my body. I did that last night since I had some tobacco at the Fairy Congress. I brought the light down into my chest area and let it shine there as a brilliant white glow. At such times, the body appears as so many vibrating atomic structures, *kalapas* in Pali.

I open my eyes and look at the clock: it is 1:10: 40 minutes have transpired. At Vipassana courses we are trained to sit for an hour without moving but at home I am easier on myself. I stretch my legs forward and wiggle my toes. I'm feeling quite alert and engaged, so I re-assume ardhapadmasana with the right foot on top this time. I re-position the blanket and re-enter the meditation by re-locating the top of the head.

Now my attention splits in two as I traverse both left and right parietal lobes simultaneously. This movement is new for me so I don't stay long. I can feel volume there but no details. At some point I will examine these lobes more completely; for now, I have another destination 'in mind.' I then arrive at the two points of the occipital lobes at the very posterior

of the skull. This also is another area to explore more fully at some other time; I linger only to give it some attention. Likewise as I move onward to the cerebellum: I feel a dense mass of neurons there and imagine that I am massaging this area as I move my attention back and forth, attempting some sort of proprioceptive awareness of this cerebral organ, but I do not stay long.

I am getting closer to my destination as I transverse the ventricle canal and arrive at the brainstem. My attention is singular again. I feel the long thickness of the brainstem as it emerges from the spinal cord. I move upward through the pons and the midbrain, and sense their presence, but I sure don't want to disturb anything so I continue upward. I finally arrive at the diencephalon, the destination of this inner journey. At the top of the diencephalon lie the two thalami, the very center of the brain both physically and functionally. The thalamus is often called the "relay station" (to use a mechanistic metaphor) since axons from around the nervous system feed into this nucleus, which in turn sends out reciprocal connections throughout the cortex. I bathe this nucleus in white light and expand the light to engulf the entire cerebral cortex. I imagine that I am cleansing synaptic connections in this way and thus improving performance.

At the forefront of the diencephalon, situated between the two thalami, protrudes a little nub called the pineal gland. I believe this gland is the center of ajna chakra, the so-called "third eye." I massage this nub with my thought, hoping to rejuvenate and revitalize it as I have heard that the pineal gland has atrophied in most modern humans. This movement is also fairly new in my meditation sequence so I do not sense much detail, only broad patterns.

I open my eyes and look at the clock: 1:30. One hour has transpired. I still feel alert and engaged so I decide to continue. I stretch my legs forward again and wiggle my toes, bringing blood back into my extremities. Then back into ardha padmasana with the left foot on top.

Now I begin the upward-downward movement through the spine: on the out-breath my attention moves down the front of my body until it rests at muladhara chakra. Then I pump the perineum and slowly move my attention up the spine with the in-breath until it arrives at ajna chakra. With lungs full I begin the out-breath as the attention descends once more: a rhythmic sequence of ascension and descension, cleansing the energy body of any accumulated karma, living free in the wee hours of the morning.

Last night this purification ritual lasted for another 40 minutes. At 2:10 I decided to crawl back into bed. The inner movement continued as I lay there on my back feeling the dense mass of my body. The next thing I remember it was 6:45: time to go out onto the deck and chant to the sunrise...