

# Pneuma Will Power Meditation

by  
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## INTRODUCTION

*It is the action of an uninstructed person to reproach others for his own misfortunes; of one entering upon instruction, to reproach himself; and of one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself.*

Epictetus (*Enchiridion* #5)

Epictetus (60-120), the crippled Roman slave who became a philosopher, also said, "...philosophers advise us not to be contented with mere learning, but to add meditation likewise, and then practice (*Discourses* II, 9)." But, he was probably not talking about *real* meditation. So far as we know the Indian yogic meditation discipline was not incorporated into any philosophy school curricula of the classical world – with the possible exception of the Pythagoreans.

To meditate in ancient Rome meant to quietly think. More like contemplation. It could also include keeping a journal of personal notes (*hypomnemata*) or observations about the ways of the world. Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic Emperor, did that and the observations he made, called *The Meditations*, are still widely read today. You can do that too, and it is the subject of another form of meditation offered later on, the *Emperor's Journal: Classical Meditation*, also found on the menu of this web site.

There is basically one form of meditation taught in the world today, the oriental form. These practices vary widely and go by many names, but the goal is always the same: stop the endless cycles of reincarnation. Of course, you will be told there is no goal and to have a goal will prevent you from achieving your goal, but once you have worked through this conundrum and stop pretending there is no goal, then you can hope to achieve a mystical experience. Then, the mystical experience you do have, if you ever have one, will be what that particular form of meditation you are practicing allows you to have. The mystical experience of a practitioner of Zen is not the same as the practitioner of Tibetan chant. It's not even the same as the student of the Zen koan.

Now there is something new. A new kind of meditation with a practical goal entirely unlike anything you will find in the mystical meditations of the East. Until now, there has really been no such thing as Western meditation. Now there is: Pneuma Will Power Meditation (aka, Pneuma). Practicing this meditation is a very effective way to strengthen the power of the will. Why do we want to do that? Because the will is the center of the decisions we make and actions we take. Having a strong will allows you to become your best, which in the world of Stoic philosophy means a noble character. Nothing is greater than this.

Learning this new kind of meditation is what you will be doing here. It was designed specifically with Stoics in mind, but is equally beneficial to all. You don't need to be a Stoic to benefit from the practice of Pneuma any more than you need to be a Hindu to benefit from the practice of Yoga. Let me be perfectly clear: this is not meditation to attain Nirvana or other form of mystical experience or enlightenment. This is not daydreaming. This is Stoic meditation. You will *not* be learning to meditate to escape from life but to live in it more fully, actively, and exceptionally. That is its purpose and your goal.

I recently spoke to a middle-aged man who practices a form of meditation known as Transcendental Meditation (TM). I was curious to find out about their technique. It costs serious money to practice TM, \$1500 and up for the adult course, which is all I knew about it. I don't know why the TM organization charges so much. Perhaps they do this to weed out the poor, the misers, and the dilettantes. Anyway, this man I spoke to about his experience with TM told me that many years ago he paid a woman TM practitioner \$200 to give him a mantra, a couple of Hindi words, and was then told to focus on this mantra by repeating it over and over while he sat upright in a chair and emptied his mind. That's it. "Two hundred dollars, please."

The magic of mantras, of course, is not in the power of foreign and exotic-sounding words; it's in the *belief* in the power of foreign and exotic-sounding words. Here's an idea: if you need a mantra, something you can really believe in, just use the name of a favorite plant. If you like you can use the Latin botanical name to make it sound special. Try something like *rosa bracteata* (an evergreen climbing rose), say it over and over while you empty your mind of all other thought. Do this sitting upright in a chair, back straight, hands in your lap, and your feet flat on the floor. About twenty minutes should do it. There, I've just saved you hundreds of dollars.

Pneuma is not TM. You won't need a mantra. It's considerably more sophisticated, and it's offered to you for the price of the effort you will make in reading this work. That's enough. I should warn you that it's also considerably more difficult, but then you should expect a Stoic meditation method to have a bit more heft to it. By the way, the fellow who learned TM has since modified his practice considerably. He threw out the mantra and makes no effort to empty his mind, which he considers impossible and a myth. (It's not.) Now, he just sits back in a comfortable chair with his feet up, closes his eyes, and daydreams. His daydreams tend to center around success at work or in romantic fantasies, but he doesn't limit them to any subject. Whatever comes to mind is OK. He does this for twenty minutes twice a day, then gets up and goes on his way.

Frankly, that's daydreaming. Meditation is *not* the same as daydreaming. Anyone who thinks it is simply doesn't understand it. Meditation is work: constructive, disciplined, and purposeful. Again, the Buddhists among will likely disagree with the purposefulness of meditation, but we will have to enter into that debate at another time. If you were hoping to budget a little daydreaming time into your day, take a walk or turn off the TV and stare out the window. If you're tired and need a rest, take a nap. You will not be able to strengthen the will by relaxing in an overstuffed chair for twenty minutes and having a romantic fantasy. Sorry.

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I've been meditating off and on much of my adult life. While in my twenties, I briefly studied a Hindu technique with the Ananda Marga Yoga Society in Portland, Oregon. I made the mistake of meditating after dinner near bedtime, and I could never stay awake long enough to get anything out of it. When I was 38 years old I got serious about meditation. At the time, I was teaching English in Nishikiwa, Japan, a small fishing village on the Inland Sea in western Honshu, the main island. My practice was motivated by isolation, alienation, and culture shock. To compensate, I meditated every morning at 6 AM when the nearby Buddhist temple bell tolled. I meditated every morning in my nightshirt that autumn and winter, often in temperatures below freezing in the shack where I was living. The cold helped me focus my mind. On nothing.

For many years I deliberately avoided instruction in meditation. I had a profound aversion to becoming a victim of the guru cult phenomenon during the 1960s and 70s, and that aversion carried over to the rest of my life. I read a few things, heard a few things, and adopted the half lotus position I learned from the Ananda Marga Yoga Society. I practiced a kind of meditation that can be summed up in a single sentence: Sit still and stop thinking. With insights from experience based entirely upon that foundation, I gradually became more knowledgeable in my approach.

It wasn't until I was 60 years old that I subjected myself to extensive formal instruction and practice. The meditation I studied was the Vipassana technique taught at a Theravada Buddhist retreat near Fresno, California. The unofficial name for it was "Meditation Boot Camp." For ten days, about 200 of us lived in absolute silence – no words read, written, or spoken – meditating 11 hours a day.

It was a thoroughly unpleasant experience. When it was over and we were allowed to speak I heard a number of the participants admit it was the hardest thing they had ever done. I did not like the Vipassana meditation method, and I do not agree with the Buddha's Four Noble Truths (beginning with the first one—all is suffering), but what I learned did help strengthen my own commitment to Stoic philosophy and eventually helped me realize how mediation could be used to actually practice what the Stoa teaches.

## Vipassana Meditation

The Epictetus ideal as described in the passage at the beginning of this chapter can be practiced as a meditation method. Frankly, it was only after having read that passage for the umpteenth time that I had an *aha* experience and realized that one and one could equal more than two. What Epictetus said about *one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself* is the essence of the Vipassana method. This method can be summed up in a single word, *equanimous*. Perhaps I can best elaborate on that single word by the following excerpt from an essay I wrote about my Vipassana education shortly after boot camp was over and I could put pen to paper.

**[excerpt from Vipassana essay]** Group meditation that afternoon began at 2:00 PM instead of the usual 2:30. Despite only two or three hours sleep last night, I was perfectly awake. I had brief naps at the breakfast and lunch breaks, and I was ready. In his rich operatic baritone, Goenka [head of the worldwide Vipassana movement] started off with a long chant, then began the instruction.

As best I can remember it went something like this: *With a clear and equanimous mind, clear and equanimous mind, equanimous mind, starting at the top of the het [the head], top of the het, starting at the top of the het, at the soft place on your het when you were a baby, move down to the skull, move down to the skull, down the skull, feeling for any sensation, any tingling sensation, any warm or wet sensation, perspiration, wetness or dryness or coolness, pulsing or throbbing, prickling or itching, anything, anything at all, anything at all. If you feel a sensation of dampness or swelling or contracting or extending, if you feel pressure or lightness, a pleasurable sensation or painful sensation, if you feel anything that has no name, don't try to name it, don't try to name it, just be aware, be aware, be aware, be aware, aware and equanimous, aware and equanimous, uniture, uniture uniture.*

I had no idea what *uniture* was, and I must have heard it four or five hundred times before I figured that maybe it was Pali for 'change, arising and passing away'. He continued, *Let your mind move down to your forehead, your forehead, feeling for any sensation, any tingling sensation, any warm or wet sensation, perspiration, wetness or dryness or coolness, pulsing or throbbing, prickling or itching, anything, anything at all, anything at all. If you feel a sensation of dampness or swelling or contracting or extending, if you feel pressure or lightness, a pleasurable sensation or painful sensation, if you feel anything that has no name, don't try to name it, don't try to name it, just be aware, be aware, be aware, be aware, aware and equanimous, aware and equanimous, uniture, uniture uniture.*

Then he went down to the eyes and nose and upper lip and chin and each part of the rest of the body, "part by part, piece by piece." And after each part and piece of the body he went through the entire litany of possible sensations we could feel. It took 1½ hours to describe what should have taken ten minutes, at most, and about the time he got to the knees I was calculating my exit. It would probably take me about seven hours to get back

to San Diego. It was now 3:30, I could be on the road by 4:00, that would get me to LA by 8:00 or 9:00 and the tail end of the rush hour, so I could be home by 11:00, or a little after. I was ready to stand up and walk out when I remembered: I'd only had a couple of hours sleep last night. This would be suicide. I stayed.

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## Origins of Meditation

Before we go on, let's go back even further. Way back. I want to spend a few minutes back at the beginning of meditation. Usually, when you read about meditation, the author avoids the subject of where meditation comes from, either because he or she doesn't know when and where meditation began, or isn't interested, or both. On the other hand, when I get involved with something I like to go back to the beginning to see how it evolved. That's important to me for some reason, and meditation is no exception. Please be patient. I won't be long.

First, we can speculate that human beings have been meditating in one form or another for many thousands of years, probably since the domestication of fire, about 800,000 years ago. Anyone who has sat before a fireplace or a campfire will recognize the trance-like state that is quickly assumed when looking into a fire. The mind is calmed and the senses are relaxed as we watch the flames dancing before our eyes. The euphoria of that state is similar to the feeling one achieves in meditation. The same is true for the hunter. Tribal people living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle even today become silent and still, in body and mind, in the focus of stalking game.

This form of meditation is what we would call mindfulness. Whether we first "naturally" learned to meditate in front of a cave fire or in stalking game, the association of that experience with religious feeling is first recorded, not surprisingly, in India. My source for this digression is Thomas McEvilley's magnum opus, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (Allworth Press, 2002, pp. 42-43).

Approximately 3000 years ago in India, at about the same time as the beginnings of the belief in reincarnation, a new spiritual ritual was developed by the *brahman* priests called the "interiorization of the sacrifice." It was believed at the time that there were two paths to the afterlife, the Way of Fire and the Way of Smoke. Fire, the preferred way, represented the Sun and smoke represented the Moon. It appears the distinction of who went one way or the other was based principally on how much was paid to the priests for their performance on the seeker's behalf. Surprise. surprise. In any case, the sacrifice of which we speak was the performance of a complicated and lengthy set of incantations and physical gestures by the priests.

The performance was so complex that while one priest performed the routine another priest, sitting to one side, went over the same ritual simultaneously but silently in his mind. If anything was omitted or done incorrectly by the performing priest the silent priest corrected the "sacrifice" inside. Hence the name, "interiorization of the sacrifice." A bit complicated, I know, but how and where one arrives in the afterlife was serious and expensive business there and then as it is in much of the world today.

Eventually, the performance of this silent part of the ritual in the early Upanisadic communities was taught to especially devout members from the community by the priests. (Let's speed up this digression.) In time, the Way of Fire came to be seen as an interior spark of divinity that existed throughout the whole life of the spiritual seeker (not unlike the spark of divinity Stoics believe we all possess inside). Anyone who properly performed the silent ritual, the interiorization of the sacrifice, was said to gain three times as much credit as he would if he simply paid a priest to do the work. I don't know how they calculated the extra credit.

To follow the Way of the Fire became the Way of the Gods; the Way of the Smoke became the Way of the Fathers. Smoke never went any higher than the moon, which meant that after death the individual would

return to earth as rain, becoming food that was eaten and transformed into semen, which was ultimately deposited in a womb, and the unfortunate individual of the Way of the Fathers was reborn. That is the how meditation began, and how it became entwined with reincarnation. By uniting the spark of fire or divinity within through silent meditation, the spiritual seeker could unite with the greater fire and enter the Way of the Gods to the sun, never to return, and thus end the cycle of reincarnation.

We're not going to teach or practice any of that. Meditation has evolved, and regardless of how it came to be, it is one of the truly great inventions of humanity. Meditation's value is affirmed by many millions, even billions of people who have voluntarily embraced it for so many millenia. Why? Part of the answer may lie in the physiology of this practice.

## Meditation Physiology

Unfortunately, as of this writing, the study of meditation from the standpoint of physiology is just beginning to become available for two reasons: scientists have only recently become interested in the subject and the activity of brain waves in meditation is a comparatively new technology. Willard Johnson, a professor of Religious Studies at San Diego State University, discusses the earliest studies in this field where much of what meditators have claimed about relaxation and regeneration is confirmed in the laboratory. "...meditation reduces usual levels of bodily activity, like oxygen consumption, heart rate and respiration, as well as the electrical resistance of the skin, an indicator of stress....even after a fairly short time of practicing meditation, a person's central nervous system changes, and that person can better handle stress (*Riding the Blue Ox Home*, Beacon Press, 1982, pp. 152-3)."

### Brainwaves

At this point, it may be useful to understand something about our brainwaves. Electroencephalograph (EEG) readings of human states of consciousness appear in four different waves, ranging from Beta waves, the tightest, to Delta, the loosest or most relaxed. We go through each of these stages twice a day: when we go to sleep at night and when we awake up in the morning. Here they are:

- Beta: fully active, awake conscious state. A tight wave length pattern.
- Alpha: light and deep levels. Lighter stage associated with relaxation and day dreaming; the deeper level is associated with silence, serenity, and the centered, present consciousness of meditation. Looser wave length.
- Theta: deep meditation and the "twilight" state we all experience every night just before losing waking consciousness and entering Delta. Even looser wave length pattern.
- Delta: deep sleep, with and without dreaming. A loopy wave length pattern.

Notice that as we progress from Beta to Delta the increasingly loosening wave length pattern of each state becomes a true reflection of how we feel – physically relaxed and mentally serene.

Professor Johnson goes on to examine results of the brainwave studies during meditation. As indicated above, the meditator's brain waves were especially pronounced in Alpha and Theta. What was even more interesting is the *synchronization of the right and left hemispheres of the brain*. The brain waves of one who does not meditate shows less activity in the right hemisphere and higher beta activity overall, attributes of tension and nervousness. While meditating, the two hemispheres of the brain come into synchronization, mirroring each in phase and as a harmonious whole. This is becoming seen as having increasing value for overall mental strength and health.

### Brain Hemispheres

The most primitive part of the brain is right at the top of the spinal cord, and we call it the brain stem. The brain stem supports our most basic and automatic or autonomic life functions, such as breathing, heart rate,

digestion, and so on. We don't have to think about these functions, the brain stem does it for us. Above that is the cerebellum controlling coordination, balance and posture. Above that is the limbic system which handles the most primal urges and emotions, such as sexual desire, anger, fear, and hunger. The limbic system is there to assist us in basic survival and self-preservation. Then we get to the cerebrum.

The cerebrum is the outer layer of the brain that makes it look like a big, gray walnut. Its the convoluted gray matter known as the cortex that is the source of conscious thought, sensory perception, voluntary movement and will. This cerebral cortex is divided into two halves, or hemispheres, and each of these hemispheres has different functions. Much of what follows on brain functions has been excerpted from the amazing lecture given February 2008 by Harvard neurobiology scientist, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, "A Powerful Stroke of Insight ( [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com) )."

The left side of the cerebral cortices is responsible for analytical work such as mathematics, logic, language, word comprehension and speech. Without it we lose our ability to talk, walk, read, write, and remember. It takes details of the past moment, organizes and categorizes from all that we have learned in the past and projects it into the future. The left hemisphere is the voice that says to me, "I am."

The right hemisphere deals with spatial relationships, color, visual reasoning, musical aptitude, and intuitive comprehension and expansion. The right hemisphere is all about the present moment—right here, right now, and all information that comes to the right hemisphere is processed as immediate present. According to Dr. Taylor, "In this moment we are perfect, we are whole, we are beautiful." There is no sense of self; there is no me; there is only the *all*. Between the two hemispheres is the corpus callosum, a thick cable of neural strands connecting the two sides in constant communication.

So much for brain anatomy 101. There's much more, of course, but that's enough to make my point. If we Stoics really live by the motto, *live according to Nature*, then to deny one side of the body or the other is to deny the intelligence that created us. Would a right-handed person show contempt for his left hand by cutting it off or tying it up so that it was immobile? Of course not. It is equally as ridiculous to do that injustice to either side of the brain. Just because we value reason is no reason to ignore, and thereby cut off, the wisdom and support the right brain was created to give.

### The Paradox

Quieting the chatter of the left brain in meditation strengthens the will; immersion in the silent present of the right brain strengthens our appreciation of all life. Increasing the synchronization of both hemispheres is the work we are doing. It's hard work, but it does have its rewards, and it makes us stronger by knowing what is going on inside our heads and having the ability to calmly direct that activity. We are what we think—and what we don't think. If our thoughts are dark and turbulent, that becomes our character; if they are bright and well-meaning, then that is the character we form. Meditation makes it possible for us to choose which manner of being we are, and thereby will become. We *become* the internal thoughts that direct our being, our character, and we are better able to understand those thoughts, and thereby guide them, by the strength of will and mind developed in meditation.

### *The act of meditation is the act of letting go*

So, how do we meditate, exactly? Here's the paradox. *We strengthen by letting go*. When you let go of the activity of the left cerebral hemisphere, you are letting go of your habitual dependence upon the constant analysis and verbalization that makes up the story of your life. You are letting go of the past and the future and existing solely in present consciousness. As Marcus Aurelius said in his *Meditations* (Book 3.10): "Throw away everything but this: everyone lives only in this present time, which is an indivisible point, and all the rest of that life is either in the past or in the future." We do only live in the present time, but we don't know it because the mind is so busy racing backwards and forwards and everywhere but in that present. That's why it appears to be

an indivisible point. It isn't, actually, as you will experience in meditation when you let go of all that mental racing about and enter the indivisible point, the present instant of existence.

*The act of meditation is not doing*

Meditation is not only letting go, it's not doing. For those who are obsessed with busy-ness, constant action and goal-oriented behavior, letting go and not doing can be downright painful, if not impossible. Unfortunately, like it or not, if this describes you, then you need meditation as much or more than the rest of us. For those who are in a constant state of doing, which describes most of us, the very edifice of civilization is built upon all this doing. Doing is rewarded; not doing is scorned. We are constantly urged to keep busy, do more, increase output. The reward system we all live by, both financially and socially, only praises the doers even as it ridicules those who are not doing, or not doing enough. The only time the enforcers of busy-ness will allow not-doing is for sleep, and even that is suspect if you do more of it than what they consider right and proper. "You sleep eight hours a day? My God! I only sleep four or five, tops." Which one was just scorned? The lazy slob who confessed to sleeping eight hours a day. Too much not doing.

Until you actually experience the benefits of the meditation paradox of strengthening the mind, and will by letting go and not doing, you will have to just approach this activity with an open mind. I would ask you to just trust me, but I've learned to never trust people who say that. So, just try it and see for yourself.

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## Pneuma Meditation

### The Chrysippus Argument

*We live and breathe by the same thing;  
we breathe by means of pneuma;  
therefore we live by pneuma;  
but that by which we live is soul.  
Therefore the soul is pneuma.<sup>1</sup>*

I would like to draw your attention to the miracle of breathing. The ancients, both East and West, were so impressed with breathing and the air that we breathe, they gave it a special honorific and made it divine. In the East, the Hindus called it *prana*; in the West, the Stoics called it *pneuma*. Beyond the obvious observation that without oxygen we all die within minutes there is much more that can be said. The reason most of us don't give it the profound respect it deserves is because it is so common. That's why diamonds are more highly valued than cut glass—even though most of us can't tell the difference. Rarity. However, if oxygen were suddenly taken away from us, all the diamonds of the world would be worthless by comparison. So let's take a moment to think about just how wonderful breathing really is.

Oxygen is the most abundant element by mass in the earth's crust, the third most abundant element in the universe, and is nearly 21% of the volume of air in our atmosphere. Common. In nature, free oxygen is produced by the splitting of water during photosynthesis, plant life absorbing sunlight for food. Green algae and certain bacteria in marine environments account for 70% of the oxygen and the rest is produced by the exhalation of the plants around us. We are not breathing some abstract chemical formula isolated and organized into a so-called table of elements; we are breathing *the living breath of Nature*.

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<sup>1</sup>Josiah Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (SUNY, 1970), p. 102

For the ancient Stoics, *pneuma* is a First Principle matter: God, the Whole, the Logos, the One. It holds the same place in the Stoic cosmos that *prana* holds for the Hindu. According to McEvilley, in virtually all aspects *prana* and *pneuma* are “remarkably parallel.” *Prana*, the breath of the cosmic being, *brahman*, is usually air but sometimes fire, and is “...the substrate from which forms arise and into which they return...the inner cohesive force running through all phenomenon and holding them together (*The Shape of Ancient Thought*, pp. 543-6).”

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John Rist points out in *The Stoics* that, “The wise man feels pleasures and pains; what he does not feel are those pleasures and pains which are mistaken judgments (California, 1978, p. 52).” This is important, so let me repeat it for emphasis: “The wise man does not feel those pleasures and pains...which are mistaken judgments.” According to Margaret Graver in *Stoicism and Emotion*, “... a single mental event, such as the recognition of a threat, is analyzable on two different levels, a physiological level, as investigated by the neuroscientist, and an intentional level as investigated by the cognitive psychologist (Chicago, 2007, p. 16).” *Intentional level* can be scholar-speak for the belief system, regardless of your philosophy, that explains and guides an emotion in contrast to the purely physiological response. In short, human emotions have two parts: the physiological activity of the brain and the belief system of the mind. Aristotle was the first to note this difference, but it was the Stoics who first developed this understanding. And what are the beliefs of the mind? The judgments.

*To God all things are fair and just, whereas humans have supposed  
that some things are unjust, other things just.* Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE)  
T.M. Robinson, *Heraclitus Fragments* (Toronto, 1999), #102

*All our pains hang on opinions...Opinion is what we are sad for.  
Each of us is as wretched as he believes.*  
Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* (Penguin, 1977), 78.13

*There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*  
Wm. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, ii, 259

*The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.*  
Milton (*Paradise Lost*, l. 253)

The key to Pneuma Will Power Meditation, then, rests in the two parts of emotion discussed above, which is an illustration of the dichotomy or polarity of mind and body. In Pneuma, the physiological reaction of fear, anxiety, grief, et cetera, can be viewed dispassionately by the belief system of the mind, because as a Stoic I understand what is in my power and what is not in my power. I know, for example, that the certainty of death is not in my power; mortality is a condition of being born and living in the familiar world of people, places, and things; and that all things are in a constant state of flux; all things arise, live for awhile, then pass away.

Knowing this, I can observe the body and with kindness and understanding can know that just as all things arise and pass away, so too will the grief that now possesses me. This is true in all things great and small. This polarity between my mind and body is also present when the mind observes the itch on my left shoulder, the ache in my right knee, and the whole host of emotions guided by the limbic system and the physical brain. The mind in Pneuma observes with *equanimity* these itches and emotions as they arise, stay awhile, then pass away. *Remain equanimous.* Aum.

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Being Dispassionate. During meditation, there will inevitably be opportunities to practice detachment. These will come from two sources: internal and external, from the mind and the body. Unbidden thoughts will come into the mind and numerous bodily impressions will come from outside of the mind. Each type, indeed all sources, must be accepted with equanimity, a calm detachment, with neither desire nor avoidance, watching them arise, stay for awhile, then letting them pass away. This is not easy and requires practice – as much in meditation as in your interaction with the rest of the world. One remains motionless in meditation. *Resolve* not to move your hands or feet, then mentally prepare yourself for many challenges to that resolution.

### Monkey Mind

You may have heard the expression, “monkey mind,” when someone is describing the difficulty of emptying the mind of thoughts. As you know, or may have guessed, it's an Asian expression made by those who grew up in cultures where monkeys ran wild and were never far away. The antics of these animals, constantly chattering and poking into things like a misbehaving three-year-old, is readily identifiable when their living example is always nearby. But in most Occidental cultures we only see monkeys in zoos and on nature shows, and the expression may be less likely to be apt and bring a smile.

There's another reason why that expression is not entirely appropriate for the Westerner, and this is really the main reason why I don't like it. I have a lot of respect for the mind, and calling it a monkey mind is both negative and demeaning. Not that I have anything against monkeys or their minds, but just because the mind is flooded with thought, even when you would rather not be thinking, does not make it any less amazing. Calling it a monkey mind is just a put-down of the left cerebral hemisphere and its constant analyzing, categorizing, and rationalizing everyone and everything, including itself. That's what it does, because that's what it's *supposed* to do, and it's very good at it.

I've also heard meditation gurus say we are all quite mad. If you stop and actually make a note of the activity of the brain, you might be inclined to agree. Thoughts that come into the mind while meditating may follow a chronology something like this: “My nose itches. It's cold in here; I'm going to stop eating fried eggs for breakfast. The acid. Coffee's OK. I need to wash the car today. Fred's really pissing me off. How come he.... It might rain. The cat box, I can smell it all the way in here. I have to remember to.... Is that the paper? I have to stop these thoughts. I wonder how long I've been sitting here?”

Probably less than a minute.

That's what the left brain does and how it dominates our life, but that's not a bad thing. There's no reason to question your sanity or call it names just because it's in a constant state of motion. We put it into such a state because life requires it to be constantly alert and ready to be assigned to any task at any second. We can be thankful for that, but while we are in meditation we must give the left brain a rest and give the right brain its due.

### The Itch

So, are you allowed to scratch when some part of your body itches in meditation? Under more normal circumstances we can go for hours without itching or scratching, at least we think we do, because the activity of itch/scratch, itch/scratch goes on without our conscious awareness. In meditation we quickly become aware of the itches of life like never before. As soon as we sit still, body parts seem to have just been waiting for this moment to send a message to your brain that it wants attention. And the brain, not having anything else to think about suddenly finds itching and scratching really interesting and important.

Itches come in all sizes from little to big and from mild to urgent! Consider these different sizes the level of your challenge or test. The little ones are fairly easy to ignore and go away in a few seconds. In degrees of difficulty

they are like addition and subtraction problems in math. Then the problems get a little harder: multiplication and division, fractions and percentages, moving on to algebra and geometry, followed by calculus, the big and ferocious itch that drains all your resources and never seems to go away. So, what do you do?

Well, scratch of course. At the beginning of your meditation practice, scratch the big ones, maybe even the middle-sized ones. Don't worry about it, you can handle the little ones. So, how exactly do you *handle* them? It's the same for one as for all, big and small. See them for what they are: matters of indifference: remain dispassionate. Don't get mad; don't get frightened. Frightened? Yes, having an itch that won't go away can transform the emotion of anger into anxiety or fear that it will never go away. Once that fear sets in you're one step away from giving up and giving in. Not just to scratching the itch but to giving up meditation practice altogether. "To Hell with it! I hate it!" And so on. Persevere, remain calm, and eventually you will not need to scratch at all.

Can there be any remaining doubt about the value of meditation? Meditation strengthens the mind and will in the same way athletic games and exercises strengthen the body, and both are the ideal preparation for combat. When a soldier goes into the Army, he's toughened up for combat by pushups, situps, running with heavy boots on his feet and a pack on his back. Meditation does exactly the same for the mind and will power, and both prepare the individual for the combat of life – in the marketplace, at home, at school, on the job with a difficult boss, obnoxious coworkers, noisy neighbors, an alcoholic mother, a juvenile delinquent son, sickness, pain, and the list goes on and on.

How does meditation help with all this? It makes you strong, but in a way that's very different from lifting heavy weights. It makes you stronger when difficulties, great and small, come your way. And come they will. While meditating you will be aware of the itches, the barking dog, the cold in the room, the car door that slams again and again, the skunk walking through the back yard, the crying baby, the garbage truck lifting and dumping your trash can. All of these sensory impressions plus the many thoughts that come to your mind with or without these impressions, all of them are what they are: matters of indifference, really. Remain equanimous.

It's important to remember that remaining equanimous is not the same as repression. Repression is stopping the mind from thinking about whatever it is that annoys you. What you do in meditation is exactly the opposite. It's acceptance, not rejection, not repression. You are accepting an irritant, either external or internal, either desired or disturbing, accepting it for what it is, neither good nor bad, but indifferent. If you can do that for a half hour in meditation, you will be more mentally prepared for all the ups and downs the rest of your day.

With this new strength of will, suddenly you realize that you can choose your reactions to events, you can choose the thoughts that create the judgment of an impression. And, if you can choose your judgments, and if you know what matters are good, what are bad, and what are indifferent, then you can know the serenity of the sage. Even if you can only manage this serenity during meditation, however long it is, at least you will know what it is to be a sage for that period of time. And to know that feeling will inspire you to want to know it all day every day.

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## In Summation

*It is the action of an uninstructed person to reproach others for his own misfortunes; of one entering upon instruction, to reproach himself; and of one perfectly instructed, to reproach neither others nor himself.*

Epicetetus *Enchiridion* #5

How this idea applies to meditation is this: one who is perfectly instructed reproaches neither others nor himself, which includes being tolerant of the wandering mind, the itches and aches, and the emotions that come your way. This is being “perfectly instructed.” The physical itches and tickles, aches and pains are viewed dispassionately. This feeling of fear in my gut or grief in my heart is neither good nor bad; it just is. It was born, it will live for awhile, and it will pass away. We can gradually achieve great skill in the art of living.

Appearances to the mind elicit responses in the mind. These may initially be emotional responses before the ruling faculty has had time to pass judgment on them. The judgments of the mind are based upon our beliefs about the appearance of the information coming into our mind. Pnema is meditation not to escape reality, the mystic's impulse, but to enter into it more fully, taking charge of your life and increasing your ability to do so.

Pnema Meditation fully engages the meditation paradox of strengthening the mind and will by letting go and not doing. Our practice is the perfect instruction of which Epictetus speaks when the judgment of the mind is one of equanimity, observing calmly and without reproach as all the stuff of life arises, lives for awhile, and then passes away. This is how we practice. Of course, some days we wake up full of piss and vinegar or joie de vivre, and some days we wake up tired and world weary. That's normal. We can't expect every meditation session to be the same. Some will be better than others. That is also normal.

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## Strengthening the Will

*The key factor separating geniuses from the merely accomplished is not a divine spark. It's not I.Q., a generally bad predictor of success, even in realms like chess. Instead, it's deliberate practice. Top performers spend more hours (many more hours) rigorously practicing their craft.<sup>2</sup>*

### The Four Ways

1. **The Discipline.** Just doing it, again and again, day after day, requires considerable discipline and perseverance through the ups and downs of any training.
2. **The Mind.** Letting go of thought and becoming Master of the Internal Dialogue.
3. **The Body.** Tickles and itches, hot and cold, aches and pains, and sagging.
4. **The Emotions.** Observing feelings and emotions in your heart and gut.

### 1. The Discipline

*We are a school of philosophy, not a school of fish*

The recommendations that I make here are to be thought of as suggestions, not as commands. When and where should you plan on doing your meditation? I recommend first thing in the morning before breakfast (when you *break your fast*), because you are more likely to be alert and rested, even as the mind is less active for not having eaten for 10-12 hours. Select a room and place in that room where you feel comfortable. You can think of this as your sacred space or your laboratory, whichever notion most appeals to you. You won't be making a lot of noise, so you are not likely to disturb anyone else in the house. If possible, go off somewhere

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2 “Genius: The Modern View” by David Brooks, Op-Ed Columnist, *NY Times*, May 1, 2009

you can be alone, which admittedly may be difficult in a crowded house. That's OK. There is no reason why you can't practice anywhere, even with your spouse sleeping three feet away. You'll find your space if you look and feel for it. Use earplugs if needed.

In preparing your meditation space choose an environment, furnishings, and implements that are meaningful to you. Think of it as an art form. Get a meditation cushion. You don't absolutely need a cushion. I meditated for years without one, but it is best for overall support. If you are in a hurry to get started in your practice and don't want to wait for a real meditation cushion, you can substitute with a couple of throw pillows. As of this writing a real meditation cushion, called a *kapok zafu*, retails for about \$50, sometimes less, and can be purchased from numerous websites on the Internet. They are also available from brick and mortar stores that specialize in Asian

aesthetic and spiritual accessories. You will be sitting on only the first half, maybe 1/3rd of the cushion. Using the whole cushion makes sitting erect *more* difficult.

The Seating positions. The three most common positions are the Burmese, half-lotus, and full-lotus. I find the Burmese sitting position is best for young and old, for learners and for the experienced meditator (see photo on second page). It is comfortable, balanced, centered, and supports meditation for long periods of time without strain. The half lotus is also good. The full lotus is good if you are young and naturally very flexible. Otherwise, it is of dubious value. Try it and see.

One thing you may notice is that the discomfort of the full-lotus does tend to focus the mind. I've done all three positions for extended periods of time and prefer the Burmese position. Sitting in a chair or on a stool is also acceptable for those with physical or environmental difficulties. (Don't forget to sit with your back straight.) Simply sitting cross-legged is *not* recommended in that it tends to pitch you to one side or the other, not centered, not balanced, and quickly becomes uncomfortable.

Positioning your hands is as important as positioning your feet, but you will have to decide what is best for you. The most common positions are with hands in front of you, one on top of the other, placed in your lap, palms up, with thumbs touching. Another is with arms extended out to the area above the knees, palms up and thumbs touching the tip of the index finger. I have never seen a meditation position with palms down, but I have done it and find it to be very comfortable. I think it's a psychological hurdle for some who believe that with the palms up they are being more receptive to the divine. As a Stoic, I believe the divine is as present inside as it is outside and having my palms down resting on my legs just above the knee in no way excludes me from fully realizing the benefit of my meditation practice.

While meditating place the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth at the juncture between your teeth and the roof of your mouth. Begin focusing on your breath as you breathe through your nose with your mouth closed. Count silently backward from 10 to 0. Like this: Inhale—exhale, ten. Inhale—exhale, nine. Inhale—exhale, eight. And so on. Slowly, easily, silently. The goal here is to have an empty mind for a minimum of these first eleven breaths. That is your first goal and expectation. With that achievement you will be a meditator. Do not expect it to happen the first, or even the tenth time. It takes practice. When you reach zero, stop counting but continue to focus on you breath. Inhale, exhale. Your eyes can gently close down now, not completely closed, almost closed, just slits through which you should be able to dimly see the outline of your knees in front of you.

Counting down to zero is an introduction in your meditation to what comes before the number one. The nothing before existence is where you go in meditation. How does existence come from nothing? The same way one comes into being from zero – a deliberate act of consciousness. But this is the cosmology of physics; let's go back to meditation. After a time, you may or may not want to continue the countdown before you begin to

meditate. Other details like that will change in your practice as you become more comfortable with the experience of meditation. You know your body and yourself better than I do. Listen to what it is telling you. We are a school of philosophy, not a school of fish.

Unless you are meditating with another person or persons, it's best to be alone in a quiet room or outside in Nature, preferably without external distractions such as ringing cell phones TVs, radios, leaf blowers, power lawn mowers, bouncing basketballs, low-flying helicopters, jumping skateboards, motorcycles without mufflers, and car alarms. This is a tall order if you live in a city, of course, but do what you can. In time, you will be less annoyed by such distractions, but at first it's better not to be inundated by them.

If it's impossible to eliminate the cacophony of noise pollution so prevalent in our cities today, use earplugs. The best way to avoid the noise is to meditate early, very early in the morning. The novice is also likely to feel more comfortable, less self-conscious about meditating if the rest of his world is still asleep. If you've never done anything like this before it may seem a little odd, even weird. Think of it as a scientific experiment.

How long do you need to meditate? Individual needs vary. I recommend a minimum of 15-20 minutes, to start, and a maximum of one hour. Some days you will want to meditate longer, just as some days your meditation will be more meaningful than others. That's natural. Do not be concerned when you have a bad day, poor focus, everything itches, falling asleep, constant chatter in the mind. Even great athletes, artists, surgeons, and performers have an off day. The more skilled you become the less you will have them. When you have a really great day in deep meditation you are likely to wonder how that happened. Don't obsess over either good days or bad days. They come and go. There's seldom an obvious, rational, cause and effect reason for them.

Meditation strengthens the will in the same way we strengthen the body—gradually getting stronger, day by day. Wishful thinking doesn't do it. Work does. You will *not* be given a mantra, but you will have a point of focus throughout your exercise, your breath. The mind needs something to focus on while meditating, and by focusing on a single thing in the front of the mind, such as your breathing, the rest of the mind is freed from its effort and becomes quiet, calm. Every time you calmly resist the urge to scratch, every time you stop a thought in its tracks and return to focusing on your breath you get stronger and come one step closer to mastery.

How often do you need to meditate to benefit from this practice? This is not a one-answer-fits-all situation here. A Theravada Buddhist would recommend a minimum of two hours a day, one hour in the morning and another hour in the evening. More, when you can squeeze it in. That's not realistic for most of us. You do not need to meditate every day for the rest of your life. Try it for a half hour to an hour in the morning just after arising for three months, six months, or as long as you need the practice. Some mornings you won't be able to meditate. You may be sick, overslept your alarm, or your mother may be visiting and is using the spare bedroom where you normally meditate. No problem. If you need to take time off, don't worry about it. Come back when you're ready. You can and will benefit from your practice every time you meditate. *Just do it!*

## 2. The Mind

Stopping the Internal Chatter. Every time you stop the chatter inside your head and return to the silence within, even for a minute, you have exercised an act of will, and you become stronger.

*Who am I talking to when I talk to myself? And, who is it that is doing the talking when I tell my self to stop talking to my self?*

The brain is a very busy organ, constantly at work on matters great and small, usually small. The conscious mind, even without deciding to do so, will grab onto any thought that comes its way. We are so accustomed to this verbal activity, the internal chatter, coming unbidden to the mind that we usually aren't even aware the

thought is here until we have been thinking it for awhile. When you do realize that you have been thinking instead of *not* thinking, which is the point of meditation, you may be inclined to be angry or disgusted or disappointed. Don't be. This is not a bad thing. In fact, on occasion it can even be a good thing. Not all thoughts during meditation are to be condemned and ignored. Some thoughts that come into the mind may be flashes of insight brought into your consciousness by your subconscious mind. Your mind is not being bad by bringing thoughts to you, and there is no reason to reprimand it. *Remain equanimous.*

How does one strengthen the will in meditation? Every time you stop the internal chatter and empty the mind you strengthen the will. Over time, the will becomes stronger, and with practice the meditator can go for longer periods of time in complete internal silence. It is at this point that one begins to understand mastery of the inner discourse that one has with oneself, one's self. It is with an act of will that you become master of this inner discourse, not just in meditation but in all situations all the time. This is the practice that makes perfection not only possible but effortless.

Do you have trouble finding your mouth with a fork or a pair of chopsticks? No. Why? Because you practiced. That's all. This is not magic. You come closer to mastering the inner discourse every time you stop and dismiss or redirect the thoughts that come into the mind during meditation. And, if you can do this during meditation you can do it any time during the day. Any thought that comes into your mind that you evaluate and perceive to be inappropriate and unworthy of a noble character you can stop and/or alter.

Stopping the mind and redirecting it at will gives you command of your thoughts and judgments. If you are in command of your judgments, if you are the one who decides what your judgments are going to be in every situation, then the slings and arrows of fortune, outrageous or otherwise, are mastered. You are free to exercise your will at any time, both during meditation and during normal active consciousness. And with this exercise, it is you who decides the emotional state that is appropriate. You know what things are good, what are bad, and what are indifferent, and with this understanding and with this strength of will you can preserve your serenity.

The internal chatter never goes away for long. When the Transcendental Meditation practitioner said that stopping all thought is a myth, he was partially correct. Sitting in meditation for 30 minutes without a single thought *is* a myth. It's not going to happen, and it doesn't need to. An experienced meditator can go without a single thought for about 11-12 slow breaths – the length of time of your initial countdown.

Eventually you will be able to hold your silence for longer, but how much longer I don't know. One day I personally counted 22 breaths without thought, but then I stopped counting. I didn't see the point. Meditation is not a contest or competition. 11-12 breaths is enough. You can do everything you need to do with that length of silence when you add them with all the other periods of 11-12 breaths in one meditation session.

Some thoughts are so fleeting as to be almost non-thought; some thoughts are lengthy and involved. Accept them for what they are, matters of indifference, and do this: if a thought is fleeting or has been going on for just a little while, simply go back to your breathing awareness. If it has been going on for a some time before you realize it and check yourself, then start counting backwards from five to zero, a briefer version of what you did when you began your session. Continue awareness of your breath.

### 3. The Body

Sitting still and erect and remaining equanimous towards the itches and tickles and aches and pains of the physical body requires an act of will. Sitting up straight without sagging will be a continual challenge. The inclination to relax and slouch will come back time and again throughout your meditation period. No harm done; just straighten up again. If it helps, think of lifting the trunk of your body upright with an imaginary string

that runs through the top of your head to the base of your spine. Don't be rigid and strained or you will wear yourself out and get grouchy. Then you will have to deal with that feeling on top of everything else. If you aren't sure of why you need to sit straight, experiment. Sit with a slouch, your spine bent, then sit upright and erect. Pay attention to the difference in your *mind*. I'm not going to tell you what the difference is; you will see it for yourself.

Now you can expect to feel the tickles and itches and aches and pains. Simply observe them. Don't think about it, simply observe them with an empty mind. They arise, stay for awhile, then pass away. Just as in all things some will stay a short while and others will stay a longer while. Their life span is impossible to know in advance, just observe quietly, calmly, and with equanimity. This is the body's nature. This is life. This is what happens in the phenomenon of existence, in the dynamic continuum we live in. You are born; you live for awhile; then you die. And so does the itch behind your left ear.

Is the room too hot, too cold? Another challenge of the body. In time and with practice you can be comfortable in extremes of temperatures that would normally cause you to be quite uncomfortable. I routinely meditate in a room that is too cold for the light clothes I am wearing, but I no longer meditate in temperatures below freezing as I did in the winter of 1983-4. Discomfort and cold does tend to focus the mind, but it is unnecessary. **Important disclaimer.** Knowing these methods may tempt some to test themselves with extreme physical challenges. No need. Remember the wisdom of the Stoic motto: live in agreement with Nature. Nature gave us nerve endings and a rational mind in order to avoid hurting ourselves. Be reasonable.

One brief story about the cold. In 1977, I was in Army Ranger School during my Infantry Officer training at Ft. Benning, Georgia. I really liked Ranger training, because it pushed your limits into areas most people never go. One December night, all night, we were on a training "mission," crawling through the frost of the Georgia swamps, soaking wet and cold to the bone. At about 4 AM, the Platoon Leader gave several of us a few minutes rest before going on.

Hungry, exhausted, and freezing, I sat cross-legged and leaned against a tree to catch a few minutes of sleep. The whole time I hallucinated that I was dying – probably hypothermia kicking in. But before I was called back into action I had a deep gut realization about cold: the discomfort of cold is *fear*. When the fear is gone, the cold doesn't go away, it's still there, but it's more of a curiosity than an unpleasantness. It's the fear that makes it so unpleasant. Don't be afraid of the cold, but know what you are doing.

Certain meditation positions can be comfortable for awhile, then cause discomfort after a few weeks or months as an accumulation of a physical stress. The body is telling you to change positions. Change positions. Trying to sit through the pain will only cause more damage. Don't do that. Give the aching body part some time off and try a new position that doesn't hurt. There is no one position that must be maintained come hell or high water. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." Take responsibility for the health and welfare of your body. Everything should be tested and found reasonable for *you*. The success of Pneuma is not dependent upon the cross-lotus, Burmese, half lotus, full lotus, three-legged stool, lawn chair, or any other seating position.

#### 4. The Emotions

Observing any and all emotional states with equanimity and objectivity requires an act of will. From Margaret Graver's *Stoicism and Emotion* we find the key to how emotions arise. They are, in short, judgments that we make about the sensory data coming into us from our world. The emotion, then, is based upon an inner discourse with our self that makes a judgment based upon what we believe to be good, bad, or indifferent. Herein lies the key to the relationship between the practice of Stoicism and meditation.

*Meditation is the discipline that gives us practical experience in mastering our judgments about impulses that give rise to emotions. With practice we increase our ability to remain calm and serene in our reactions to incoming impulses that may lead to irritation or other rising passions.*

Anger, jealousy, sadness, arrogance, fear, and lust – all emotional states are treated the same in meditation as heat, cold, aches, pains, tickles and itches. Remain equanimous. Observe these states without desire or aversion. Simply observe what they are, how they feel. Allow yourself to feel them without judgment, perhaps even with a bit of naive curiosity as if you were an alien to the phenomenon of physical existence and were fascinated by all the strange feelings that come with being alive and human. This is what it is to be here in the realm of the polarities, a sentient part of the dynamic continuum. It really is quite amazing.

Sometimes the feeling you have in your chest or gut while meditating is an emotion; other times it can be fatigue or just plain restlessness. Focus on it without conscious thought. Continue to be aware of your breathing. Observe the feeling with equanimity. Nature's creation of our ability to feel when combined with rational thought encourages ethical behavior. Sometimes it saves our lives. There are times when the feeling of fear and the desire to fight or run for our lives is exactly the most prudent course of action to take. Not all impulse to action is false.

Let's use a real world example of the kind of emotion that can arise during meditation. While at work yesterday you told your boss in rather blunt terms that he was mistaken about some project or idea that he was promoting. Obviously, he didn't appreciate your comment as you could tell by his body language and familiar scowl. He reacted angrily, stormed away, and now you can anticipate trouble after you finish meditating, eat breakfast, dress and go to work today. You *may* even deserve it, but that's not the point. The point is that you have been feeling a slow burn of anxiety ever since this confrontation, and now, while you are trying to meditate, that repressed anxiety is coming out front and center.

Do you think that the employee is the only one feeling anxiety now? Probably not. Both the employee and the boss are likely to be affected with the same or a similar emotional discomfort. Even mentally working through the incident several times is unlikely to take away that feeling of dread. I'm not just making this up. I've been on both sides of this kind of situation, and many of you have been, too.

Before long the feeling of dread becomes one of anger and resentment at the other person for having caused the feeling of dread in the first place. At this point, the original emotion is not being cooled down; it is being seriously inflamed. Do either of them like how this feels? No, of course not. Feeling anxiety, anger, and resentment all at the same time does not feel good. It does not increase our happiness.

Back to meditation. What do you do about it? When you have an emotion, or any combination of emotions, arising during meditation, bring it out and *feel* it. Don't analyze or examine it rationally or verbally. Don't repress it. Don't argue with yourself all the pros and cons of why you should or should not feel the way you do, simply be aware of how it feels. Allow it to exist within you, front and center stage. Hold it there without thought, without judgment, without any attitude at all. Simply let it be – just as if it were an itch or tickle on the end of your nose. Don't scratch it. Just observe. Remain equanimous. Remain objective in the present where the emotion is residing.

Be aware with equanimity, neither love the emotions nor hate them. Just let them be there, quietly, calmly, objectively, until at last they go away. And just like an itch or a tickle, sooner or later, they *will* go away. Both physical and emotional states are given their staying power over you by your attachment to them. No attachment; no power. Emotional memories of the past or emotional expectations of an unpleasant future will not require prompting during meditation; they will arise unbidden. You can count on it. Continue awareness of your breathing as you feel the emotion arise. Remain objective. Remain equanimous. Breathe.

Allow yourself to feel this emotion, but not be attracted or repulsed by it. *Either attraction or repulsion will cause you to be attached to it, and as long as you are attached to it you will not be free from it.* Continue to be aware of the feeling for as long as it lasts. Breathing. Pretty soon, just as if it were felt as an itch on the outer edge of your right nostril, the emotion will lose its power, and gradually subside. Breathing. You can even wordlessly recall it if you like. If it's a particularly strong emotion some residual feeling may remain. Breathing. It may even take several meditation sessions to deal with an old or deep emotional scar. Observe with equanimity until it is completely gone, then return to serenity.

When you have finished your meditation, open your eyes. It's not comfortable to just jump right up and get busy. Sit for a moment longer, and if you are meditating first thing in the morning, consider the day ahead. You may have some vow or affirmation you may wish to remember now.

Remember, by quieting the voice that says *I am*, we realize the other, the *all*. Strengthening the quiet side, the right cerebral hemisphere, increases the synchronization of both right and left hemispheres of the brain. Unfortunately, most people let the right brain wither and atrophy from lack of use. As stated earlier, the brain waves of one who does not meditate shows less activity in the right hemisphere and higher beta activity overall, attributes of tension and nervousness. While meditating, the two hemispheres of the brain come into synchronization, mirroring each in phase and as a harmonious whole. If we as a people respect the mind, then doesn't it seem reasonable to take care of it, to develop its optimal functioning? There's no excuse for right-brain ignorance or hostility, real or feigned.

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## Afterword

### Stoic Meditation

I already said this, but I want to say it one more time in case you have forgotten. You don't have to be a Stoic to benefit from Pneuma Will Power Meditation. You can believe or not believe whatever seems right to you and still appreciate how this exercise strengthens the will. However, it's the judgments and inner dialogue of the mind that are brought into this act of strengthening the will, and unless you have reasonable judgments you will not realize the maximum benefit of this form of meditation. Take the time to look at *The Stoic Handbook* located on the menu of the Stoic Meditation website. You are not required to believe anything illogical or unreasonable in Stoic philosophy. You are not required to believe in myths, legends, or hearsay. Everything you need to know to understand how this meditation really works you can learn by reading the *Handbook*. It takes a couple of hours, and it's free.

For those who are curious to know what Pneuma has to do with Stoic philosophy, the following briefly describes that relationship. First, it's important to know that there is no claim, implied or otherwise, that Pneuma was ever performed by Stoics in antiquity. It is related to classical Stoics by virtue of what it is and what it does. It is a practical exercise in strengthening the will in the four ways outlined in the text. If you have read *The Stoic Handbook* you know how profoundly important the will is in the choices and ensuing conduct of one's life.

Why are such exercises important? Because Stoics, past and present, believe that theory is not enough; it's only the beginning in *the art of living*. Many people and many programs use that phrase, but it was the Stoics that first made it popular. Stoics are expected to learn theory then practice various exercises designed to adapt that

theory to philosophy as a way of life. Ours is not a philosophy of formal and abstract speculation on the nature of reality. We live it. However, other than a handful of possible exercises we have almost no certain information that has come down to us about how the classical Stoic put theory into practice. And now it's your turn.

## Four Levels of Meditation

If you have read this far you deserve to know that there are levels of meditation beyond Pneuma WPM. This is a guide to what you may experience if you continue your meditation practice. Within a month or so, you will certainly come to know level one, and some may even become familiar with level two. Levels three and four usually require years of sitting, but it is not for me to say that you cannot experience all levels sooner than is common.

NOTE: Some people are quite visual and claim to see all sorts of things while meditating. I'm not, and I don't, ever. Traditional wisdom is that if you see anything you are hallucinating. Forget it and keep meditating. Meditation is not about seeing visions—as the Biblical prophets claimed to do. That's a wholly different world and practice. If you never “see” anything at all, ever, you are doing just fine.

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### THE FOUR LEVELS:

1. **Will Power**, so-called, because it is the most effortful stage and requires considerable strength of will even to get into position and begin meditating. It takes even more will power to stay there and deal with the aches, pains, and itches and the wandering, disobedient mind. All this effort contributes to the practice of the Stoic, because, as you know, the location of all good and evil is in the human will. By strengthening it we can choose our internal dialogue and manage our assents with much greater ability.

*Characteristics:* mind wanders far and wide, and you may not even realize that you have been thinking about something(s) until long after you stopped listening to your breath and resumed the internal dialogue with yourself. Meditating in the first level is like enduring a tug of war between the resolve of your will and your mind's desire to stop this nonsense and get up.

2. **Deep Meditation.** The aches, pains, and itches may still be present, but they are much less troublesome. The mind still wanders off and tries to dominate the situation, but now the will power has won, and the mind doesn't get very far before it is pulled back by the will to the breathing silence.

*Characteristics:* there is a feeling and realization that you are in deep meditation and have now joined all those who have meditated before you for hundreds of years. They experienced this feeling too, and you are part of that lineage. You are glad to have come this far, but you are still ready to call it a day, a good meditation day, and get on with your real life which awaits you, beckoning with increasing urgency.

3. **Ananda.** At some point in your experience as a meditator, sooner or later, you will experience what the Hindus call *ananda*, or bliss. This level is called that because it *is* that. Ananda comes

to you; you do not go to it. You cannot wish it or will it to come over to you no matter how long you sit. It comes when it is ready, and that's all I know. When it comes you will know it. It is unmistakable. There will be no question. It's as obvious as sitting in air one minute and sitting underwater the next.

*Characteristics:* For the first time in your experience as a meditator you will *not* want your meditation session to end. You will still feel the aches, pains, and itches, but they won't matter. Your mind will *not* wander unless you give it permission and direct where it goes. Your breathing slows w a y down and becomes very shallow. Sooner or later ananda fades, but it leaves a strong impression, and with mindfulness you can keep the remainder with you—sometimes for hours.

4. **The Ineffable.** An experienced meditator can experience ananda nearly every time they meditate. The fourth level, the ineffable, is less common, even rare, and there are those who meditate for a lifetime and never go there. It's called *ineffable* for a reason, and unlike most who have experienced it I will not attempt to describe it for two reasons: one, it's ineffable; and two, when you describe the fourth level to one who has not experienced it they will be more likely to look for that experience. That's an unnecessary distraction. If I tell you it's one thing; you look for that one thing. If I tell you it's another; you will look for that. If I tell you it's more than one thing you will prepare yourself for a series of experiences.

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