

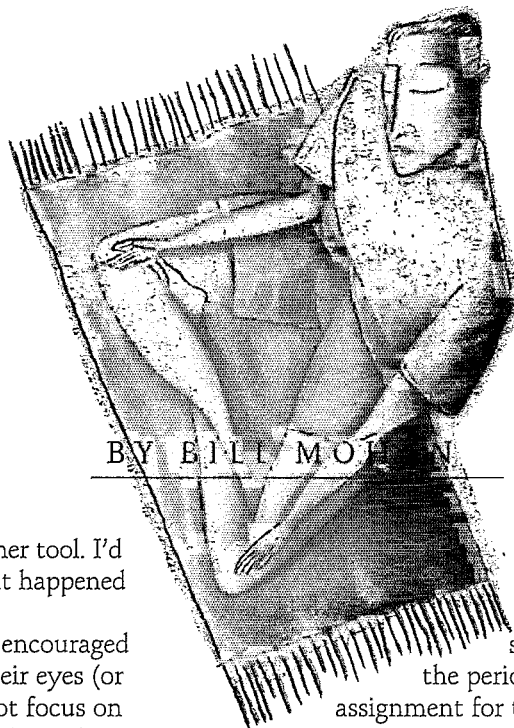
MEDITATION ON MEDITATION

I am a Greek and Latin teacher. As such, I deal in grammar, logic, organization — rules. I value their importance, the ability rules have to facilitate communication by laying a common ground. I know too that they help us to analyze, and thus make proper judgments. But like anything else, these rules are a tool. They are not to be relied on reflexively, mechanically, however comfortable it might be to do so. On certain days, we, as teachers, must fish around in the toolbox for something else — another rule, another tool. I'd like to share with you something that happened recently in two of my classes.

At the beginning of the period, I encouraged students to sit comfortably, close their eyes (or leave them just a little open), and not focus on anything. Begin to let go of all thoughts. The thought of the test you did badly on — let it go. The thought of the friend in the hallway — let her go. The thought of lunch — let it go. At this point, heads were still up. I continued to say "Let it go" for a while, until it seemed that they were in a state of rest. The silence was almost tangible. I went further: "If you want, put your head down." Everyone did. The lights were off. Windows were open enough to let in some air. Breathing was deep. A few minutes later, I said, "If you want to, you can go to sleep." It seemed that some of the kids were taking me up on it. It was the kindergarten type of sleep — remember how that room felt so warm and insulated from the outside world? The class went on like this until the bell.

All day, voices inside and out are telling these kids what to do. There's never enough time. So many conditions to deal with. It's relentless. They're always worried about what has happened and what's going to happen. Nobody ever tells them that it's OK to release for a while. Based on how readily they responded, I'd say they were crying out for this. They seemed to know instinctively how to get to their deeper selves. They seemed to appreciate that someone told them *not* to worry. More likely someone's telling them the opposite — worry about this test, this game, this application, this person. We batter them with information. Is it any wonder some seek refuge in alcohol, drugs, caffeine, bullying, and reckless behavior?

We need to help students clear a kind of retreat-time on a regular basis. Help them to let it go. Remind them that everything will be there when they get back. And when they come back to it, they'll be recharged. They'll



attend to it better. They'll even see it differently. Maybe they will have grown. Maybe their perception will have changed. Maybe where there was a problem, now there is no problem. They'll find new opportunities, because their horizons have expanded. And if they practice this often enough, there won't be that chronic backlog of fatigue.

I was astounded by how quickly these kids took me up on this. It started out as a lark. I merely said, "Close your eyes like the Buddha." They snapped to it — tenth graders, by reputation the world's most savage, impulsive animal! Breathing ran easy through the period. At the close, I gave them this assignment for the evening: Write about your experience; tell me what you felt; look at what you did during this thirty-five minutes; how did it go for you? No required length. No grade. No right answer.

At lunch, one of the teachers told me that he just taught a number of the students who had been with me. The day before, he said, his class seemed tired and stressed. Today it was easier and they got more done. Later on, some junior students in another of my classes said they heard what we had done earlier. They were curious, so I talked about it. At the end of my description, they asked, Can we try it? So we did. Same thing happened. Within moments, there was not a peep. They took to it like ducks to water.

I hope it is obvious in all this that I am not suggesting we abandon our curricula. Only that we allow spaces in it for the human spirit. In this way, our students may grow (w)holistically in the knowledge that what we are teaching them is, as the Jesuits say, *AD MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM* (for the greater glory of God).

The writing assignments soon came in. Pat said the exercise helped to clear his mind of unneeded thoughts. Seung Kyu said he did very well afterwards on the calculus test. James said it was difficult *not* to think of something I told him not to think about. Edmond worked out a problem with his parents. Will woke up and didn't feel groggy. Some were amazed at how they felt. A lot of them just thanked me. And the next day, we were back parsing verbs.

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TITLE: Meditation on meditation
SOURCE: Independent School 60 no4 Summ 2001
WN: 0119602826017

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