

Moving Meditation

No Ohmmm Required

by Elly V. Darwin

What do you envision when you hear the word meditation? An enlightened person sitting cross-legged, seemingly in a trance? Do you recall phrases like “focus on your breathing” or “let everything else go”? Do you have a hard time picturing yourself doing that? Have you tried to do it, but found it doesn’t work? Have you felt like you’ve failed at meditating?

I must confess, in the above sense, I’m an on-again-off-again meditator. I’ve read and heard that meditation is wonderful—once you get past the beginner’s stage of distraction and practice it regularly—and I’m definitely attracted to the many benefits of meditation. I’ve taken hacks at it (and told myself each time that this time I’ll stick with it), but for some reason I’ve just not mastered the sustainability of it. Sound familiar?

Well, I’ve discovered a different form of meditation, and have achieved many of the same benefits that traditional meditation is said to bring. I’ve come to know a wonderful sense of calm, a deep sense of ok-ness with myself and my world, and (although I haven’t disturbed my reverie enough to slap a BP cuff on my arm), I’m sure my meditations have lowered my blood pressure

and enhanced my overall health and wellbeing.

In my meditations, I’ve been able to distance myself from pressing problems enough to see them in a better light, and even to see some good solutions that I might not have discovered otherwise. I’ve been able to reflect on my life and to crystalize my personal philosophy of what’s important and how I want my life to be expressed.

The most fun of all, however, is that I’ve hit upon some creative ideas—not the least of them being the creation of Clearheart Communications, the Clearheart Community, and the website that contains this article. In

fact, one morning during a meditation, it occurred to me write an article about it. It’s the one you’re reading right now.

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Some common definitions of meditation are that it is quiet, contemplative thought or musing (often of a religious, spiritual, or

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philosophical nature). It is described as a state of deep concentration, as well as the regular exercise of such, as in the *practice of meditation*.

However, there is nothing that mandates a sit-still posture. No rules

about how the hands should be set, whether the eyes should be open or closed, whether vocalizations should be uttered. None of that. I haven't seen anything that explicitly states that the above definition cannot be carried out while moving. So, I've embraced the moving meditation. Works for me.

What is a moving meditation? My definition is that it is any gently repetitive movement or activity that requires

a minimum of effort or concentration on the activity itself, thus freeing the mind to move into a deeper state of concentrated thought. The idea is that, while the body is not still, as in more traditional meditation, it is sort of on autopilot. For me, this means not even thinking about my body in terms of a particular posture or breathing pattern. Instead, the body is given something simple to do to occupy itself so the mind can occupy itself with deeper thoughts.

What kinds of activities are moving meditations? Except where physical safety is a concern, it really doesn't matter. I was sweeping my patio when I got the idea for this article. I discuss this idea a bit in my forthcoming book, *My Garden, My Self: Life Lessons from a Lifetime of Gardening* (2023). I enjoy simple gardening tasks like gentle

pruning and pulling weeds—no, I'm not interested in pulling *your* weeds—because doing those kinds of activities in the serenity of my garden tend to put me into a meditative state. Our house has a patio and a path of pavers connecting the patio to a flagstone terrace, all under a large tree. It's a lovely spot, but trees tend to drop stuff, so I'm sweeping every few days. I don't mind that at all. I could clear the debris in just a few minutes with a leaf blower, but I enjoy the soft *swish, swish, swish* of the straw broom. I like that I'm out there longer, gently moving around, corralling the leaves into little piles and scooping them into the old bucket I carry around with the broom. I take that time to appreciate the plantings and other things in the garden, and I'm sure to look up periodically and take in the beautiful tree canopy and Colorado sky. All the while, my mind is off leash in its own playground, free to spin, to create, to mull, to ponder whatever it wants. This particular day, I wound up with a clean patio and terrace, the idea for this

article, and the opportunity to hang out in one of my favorite spots. Not bad!

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What if you're not a gardener? Well, gee, the possibilities are endless. Some people may draw or sketch or doodle. Some may throw pottery or swim laps or go for long walks. (Do you think Robert Frost and Walt Whitman were merely walking, or were their walks giving them something more than exercise?) Walking is indeed a perfect opportunity for meditative reflection. If you've ever seen the Chartres labyrinth pattern, it is designed to be walked upon as a spiritual experience, a moving meditation dating back to medieval times. (Ah shucks, I thought I invented this concept!)

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One of my brothers had a classic British car and a highly stressful career. One way he liked to detach and meditate was to clean his car. He enjoyed the repetitive motion of waxing (wipe-on-wipe-off) and polishing the wood interior. He liked the smell and feel of the clean, supple leather and enjoyed rubbing it down with saddle soap. His moving meditation allowed him to think through creative solutions to some of his business issues. And his car was a thing of beauty.

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Our house was last painted by a deeply religious man. He painted the entire exterior by hand, shunning the typical paint spray guns. He said that painting made him happy because he could praise God all the while he was moving his brush back and forth. He frequently hummed or sang softly as he worked, and he did a really great job.

I should add here that the whole purpose of the moving meditation is for the movement to be rather automatic. If you've never painted a house before, you would need to concentrate more on what you're doing—not to mention things like climbing up and down a ladder or reaching a wet paint brush into the weird little corners that houses sometimes have. A moving-meditation activity should be comfortable and familiar enough that you can easily divert your focused attention away from it and yet be able to jump back into the here-and-now anytime as needed.

And yeah, in the “Kids, don't try this at home” department: Obviously, any activity that requires enough concentration to prevent damage or injury is *not* a good candidate for a moving meditation. Using power tools, operating machinery, and

driving a vehicle come to mind—can I say *duh!* here?

What's best for you? Any mildly repetitive activity will do, so you decide. It all depends on your mindset, your environment, and what ultimately brings you joy. Joy doesn't have to be of the whoopee-woo-hoo sort, but mild pleasure is an important supporting element. I don't recall a distasteful chore ever putting me into a meditative frame of mind. If you hate being outdoors and are afraid of bugs, pruning or sweeping the terrace might not bring you the same meditative satisfaction it does for me. While I like having my car look nice, I gladly pay somebody else to detail it. I enjoy painting interior walls, but I know my limits: if it entails getting on a ladder, a relaxed meditative state will not occur.

What if you set out to experience a moving meditation, so you perform some simple activity, and then nothing happens? No surprise aha, no creative breakthrough, no spiritual epiphany. “Did I fail? Did I do something wrong?” you wonder. No! There's no guarantee, but that's sort of the fun of it. There are many times I've gone outside to prune some plants, and in the end, the plants got pruned. That's all. No magic, no brilliant insights. So what! The plants look better and I still enjoyed being out there.

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If I can leave you with one concept from this article, it is this: Slipping into a meditative state while going through some sort of motion is a side benefit. Whatever gifts you receive as outcomes—clarity, creative ideas, solutions to a problem, deeper spiritual awakening—they are *gifts*, a happy bonus.

Some people expect gifts and are disappointed or angry if they don't receive them. Other people are happy and thankful when they do receive them.

So, to receive the benefits of meditation, do you need to sit cross-legged, with your back straight (straight *and* relaxed?), your hands (oh, wait—is it palms up or palms down?), and your eyes closed (or is it OK if they're open a little)? Do you have to breathe a certain way? Should you utter a prolonged

o-o-oh-mmm, a-a-hhh, or some other sound? Nothing wrong with that. Do so if you like and if that works for you. But it's OK to move, too.



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