



## tuesdays with Lori

musings on life, loss and everything in-between

### EVERYONE COMES TO MEDITATION FOR A REASON (or how my meditation practice committed to me)

*Monthly email on life, loss and everything in-between written by me, a person with strong opinions and a person who believes that sitting and intentionally doing nothing can incrementally repair the world.*

For many people it's to decrease anxiety or to lessen what they describe as stress. For me, the initial goal was to complete writing a novel. It was a writing friend who suggested I might try learning meditation. She suggested I contact a retired high school English teacher she knew who offered one-on-one sessions which ran for an hour and a half for a period of six weeks. Since her friend met her

students in her apartment, she required a personal referral. Naturally, I asked about the fee. Although many people have tried to pay her, Lee has never accepted money. According to Lee, the world would be a better place if everyone learned to meditate. She has set out to change the world one meditant at a time.

From the very first time I visited Lee in February of 2012, I began to write a blog about my experience in learning to meditate. Slow Breath Soft Heart documented my daily attempts at sitting in stillness on my own. It turned out to be an inadvertently brilliant idea because even though in reality I was accountable to no one, it felt as if I were. Through the blog I kept track of how often I sat and reported on my progress.

Here's an early blog entry from Slow Breath Soft Heart:

#### I Have an Internal Alarm Clock

Lee is a gentle master of guided meditation. Deep diaphragmatic breaths, focused relaxation of limbs and muscles, then visualization of the organs of my body starting with the flux of blood through my heart and ending with the squishy shifts in the geometry of my brain. We focus on the spine and its flexibility: the spine— a perfect metaphor for everything we want in this life; flexible enough to let us bend and strong enough to hold us erect. Lee suggests I don't need to set an alarm in order to know when my twenty minutes of meditation is up. It's the same principle as waking up one minute before your morning alarm clock goes off. It turns out my internal alarm clock is damn accurate. Settle down, relax, meditate, and somehow I intuitively know when twenty minutes have passed.

Every week, I would arrive at Lee's apartment and we would talk about how my practice was going. She'd often tell me a story that inspired me, then we'd practice together. First off, we'd do some diaphragmatic breathing, then a body relaxation scan and finally we'd sit together in stillness for twenty minutes. When I left, I would recommit to sitting every day for twenty minutes. The first few weeks of practice were magical for me. I immediately began to notice myself being more aware, especially in conversations where I began to focus less on the words people were saying and more on where they seemed to place their emotional energy.

I didn't have a regular time or place to sit and although my schedule was erratic I kept to it and reported to my mostly imaginary audience (a few friends had begun to follow my progress). The benefits I was beginning to notice were subtle, but overall something was happening.

Here's another entry:

#### I Await Clarity

Lee told me that the stillness allows one to see others more clearly because one sees oneself more clearly. I await clarity. I look at myself and see the same person I have always seen— that person who struggles and lacks the ability to live up to her own standards, as a writer as a friend, as a person who's never been able to stick to a diet. But, I have been successful at preserving twenty minutes each day (oops, yesterday was only ten) and trying my best to halt thoughts. Tonight, there was the beat of rain as I coaxed my third eye to relax into my heart. Tomorrow, I meet with Lee.

And then:

#### Mind Gnats

Flit. Swat. Mind gnats everywhere. If I get a few blank moments in my twenty minutes of practice, I am satisfied.

So many things that seem so obvious to me now were mind-blowing to me in the beginning.

#### I Know How to be a Best Friend

Lee was eager to hear about my practice this week and delighted to know I managed to meditate every day since we first met. She is here, she told me, to support my practice and for me to support her in her practice. Lee explained an important skill one can accomplish through meditation is to learn to be one's own best friend — to give yourself the support and love and even the boundaries you give to a friend. I have a best friend. We forgive each other for what we cannot forgive ourselves. The idea that it might be possible to do this for myself is powerful.

It started to become very clear, I needed to practice treating myself with compassion.

#### Lots to Learn

I reported to Lee that on Saturday, I was quite harsh with myself, so disappointed that after some pretty significant progress, the attitude adjustment I was hopeful was taking place, seemed to be stalled and would never really change me from being exactly who I was. On Sunday, I did not meditate. Lee's comment: "Who would want to sit for twenty minutes with the person you described?"

But with practice, I started to learn to treat myself more kindly.

#### Apologies

FULL DISCLOSURE. I am an honest person. So here t'is. Today, I did not meditate. Today, I did not arrive. I apologize to me. Sorry, Lori. Tomorrow will be a better day.

Even though it was easy to backslide.

#### Still Me

I have clumsinesses. There are awkward untoward comments that replay in my mind over and over. There are dropped coffee cups and broken glasses, and once there was a dumped pan of lasagna at a dinner party. There are forgotten birthdays, sympathy cards unsent, sarcastic emails mistakenly dispatched to a stepson's teacher. I had an expectation that meditation would make me more gracious. I'd become the kind of person who didn't do so many boneheaded things. It would make me aware of stuff going on around me that I'd never quite tuned into before, things that other people seemed to manage so effortlessly. Meditation would clear my mind and I would be able to slow my words and my actions to a cadenced elegance.

Yet, I am meditating and I am still me.

People often ask how I managed to commit to a regular meditation practice. As I look back on it, it's not that I committed to a practice, rather my meditation practice committed to me. The reason I came to meditation is not the reason I stayed with it.

Lots of people have asked me how life is different since I began this meditation journey. It's damn hard to explain. I say things like "I'm less reactive" or "Things have slowed down a bit" or "I've cleaned out two drawers." On the flip side, even though many things seem clearer, my own life is just as foggy and inscrutable as it has always been. It's difficult to quantify how life has been different for the past forty-four days, yet different it is. There's a part of me that is calmer than the person I used to be, yet the person I used to be is always still there. I'm a bit more aware how self-criticism has limited me in so many of the things most valuable to me. When that loop of critical thought plays in my head, I'm aware of just how hard I am on myself. In discussions with others, it's easier for me to tap into what I truly want to convey. It's not that I'm communicating better with others (I can't be the judge of that), but I intuit on a deeper level what is important to me.

The goal I had when I learned to meditate is not the same as the goal I have now, a decade in, for continuing my practice. Mostly I stick with it because I remember life before I had a meditation practice and I'm terrified of going back there. What commands my attention turns out to be my life. To finish writing the novel, take a walk with a toddler, console a grieving friend, scroll through my twitter feed. A meditation practice has allowed me to develop the capacity not to act and to allow things to percolate. This practice reminds me of who I am and what I am here to accomplish in my finite and fleeting time.

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Meditation is the only intentional, systematic human activity which at bottom is about not trying to improve yourself or get anywhere else, but simply to realize where you already are.

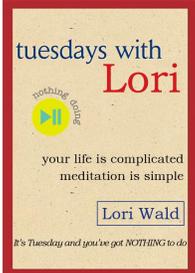
-- Jon Kabat-Zinn

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**Do try this at home.**  
Periodically throughout your day take a moment to stop, take a breath, observe and then proceed.



A mindfulness meditation practice helps clarify intentions. Check this out for guided audio meditations ranging between 5 and 20 minutes. Personal coaching is also available.



tuesdays with **Lori**

A 30-minute neuroscience-based mindfulness meditation class designed to help steady your nervous system.

CONNECT WITH ME

Learn about mindfulness and meditation, no experience necessary.

If any of this resonated with you, let me know. I would love to hear your reactions, dissonances and questions.

[Contact Me](#)

Join us the first Tuesday of every month. Next session is February 7, 2023 at 4:00 PM EST. COMPLIMENTARY. [Click here to sign up.](#)