

Point 3: Adopt a spiritual practice that works for you

Michael: If you followed our advice for Point 1, and I hope you did, and you're now cut way, way back, maybe to zero on your watching of commercial mass media, you are, in a way, clearing out some space in your mind. And what is going to fill that space? Well, that's where we make a deliberate effort to make sure that the space that's been vacated is filled with positive imagery. Now, this is a very personal matter. Some people find one kind of meditation practice for them than another.

And at Metta, you know, we have our own suggestion to make, but we do recognize that it's only our personal suggestion. I think it will work very well for most anybody. But there's no difficulty at all with your finding a spiritual practice of your own. And when we say a spiritual practice, I don't mean a spiritual practice that you make up. I mean finding one on your own.

And when we say, "A spiritual practice," I guess I'm thinking primarily about the ancient practice of meditation. Because as Thich Nhat Hanh has pointed out, as Mahatma Gandhi has pointed out, you may believe in nonviolence, but when you go out there and you're facing the police dogs or the people are bearing down on you with lathis or whatever, that nonviolence is going to fly out the window unless you have been strengthening it every single day with a practice of meditation. And as far as I am aware, meditation means willfully, steadily, compassionately, patiently, controlling the thought process in your own mind.

And you're trying to do two things. You're trying to slow that thought process down. Because, in fact, we've been speeded up greatly by modern conditions. And you're trying to put not only positive but inspiring images in your head. And those two things work very well together. When you think negative things, your mind speeds up. When your mind speeds up, you tend to think negative thoughts.

Conversely, when you have something inspiring, an image of a great human being or a profound piece of wisdom, in your mind, your mind will slow down and you will tend, at a very deep level, to concentrate on that beautiful message. So, we find that the practice called, "Passage meditation," which you can find out about on a website called, Www.easwaran.org, is one that we can recommend in full confidence.

But I say again that different people find different things helpful for them. What you want to do is find a practice which slowly brings your own mind under control. And you have to do this yourself. We're not talking here about hypnotism or making yourself

unnecessarily vulnerable to others. If you're looking around for a spiritual practice, one criterion that you can use is plausibility. You know, back in the old days in Berkeley, I remember every imaginable thing was going on and there was even something called, "Chaotic meditation." Well, what you're trying to accomplish in meditation is the exact opposite of chaos. So, that was on the surface already not a good idea.

Secondly, if there's a teacher – and we do find, incidentally, that a teacher living or otherwise is just about indispensable. If there's a teacher, what did she or he live like? Did they ride around in a Rolls Royce and did they have armed bodyguards? Do they have all kinds of dubious habits? Or were they simply, sincere, genuine human beings who didn't need you for anything, but just wanted to help? That's the second criterion.

And the third is, you know, look at the followers. If there's, you know, thousands of people who have been Practice X, Y, or Z, look and see what's happened to them in the course of some years. And then the fourth and final and most important criterion is to go ahead and give it a try. But it is very helpful not to jump from practice to practice. If you find one that looks like it could work for you, give yourself to it. Give yourself a period of time to see what it feels like. It's not going to feel like a lot of fun, but at the end, you'll look back and say, "Okay, I used to be addicted to chewing gum. And you know what? I haven't thought about chewing gum for five straight days. Something is going on here."

So, your own experiences are going to be the final criterion and in everything that we have to suggest here is about developing your own sensitivity and your own responsibility. So, that's what we would recommend, passage meditation that's taught by the Blue Mountain Center of Meditation at Easwaran.org, or some other practice which can really enable you to fill your mind with inspiring, uplifting thoughts and images and get some of your more undesired impulses under control.