

April Michelle Dean

MEDITATION: AN INTIMATE ACT

SNB Magazin 16

Meditation: An Intimate Act

By April Michelle Dean

SNB Magazin 16



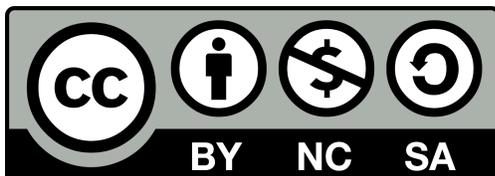
First published 2013 at www.speculativenonbuddhism.com

Anti-copyright 2019

Share ideas freely.

Have integrity.

Give credit where credit is due.



CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 (Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International). This license permits you to remix, tweak, and build on this work even for commercial purposes, as long as you credit it and license your new creations under the identical terms. This license is often compared to “copyleft” free and open source software licenses. All new works based on yours will carry the same license, so any derivatives will also allow commercial use.

Meditation: An Intimate Act

Right now, for the next few moments, I am interested in talking about the act of sitting. That's it. And for me, there is no way around it. Meditation is an intimate act. I have rarely heard it discussed in these terms. Still, it keeps showing up for me as an intimate act. Intimacy is defined in *Webster's Dictionary* as "marked by a very close association, contact, or familiarity." When I first walked into a meditation hall I was looking for peace. What I found was contact, and it was not peaceful. I was looking for something "spiritual." What I found was contact, and it was not spiritual. I was looking for something to ease my pain. What I found was contact WITH that pain, and it was not easy. I quickly discovered this was not a soothing act, but one that brought me intimate association with all the things I had dissociated from so long ago. I immediately had a choice: either pay attention or not. I could choose contact with my breath/body/mind/stimuli and its embodied nightmares, or not. It was as simple, and as vulnerable, as that. The choice continues to be this simple for me, up to this very morning's meditation.

When I choose to sit still, quiet, unmoving...my body is vulnerable, biologically and evolutionarily speaking. Millions of years of violence and predation have taught us that when we squat, whether to shit or to meditate, we are exposed. There is no guarantee when I shit, or when I sit, of safety or comfort. Yet still I do it. My guard is down, my gaze is down, my sympathetic nervous system is dialed down and my parasympathetic system takes over. (This is why our stomachs churn and growl, why we burp, and why we fart during meditation. Our body has decided we don't need blood supply shunted to our muscles to quickly run away from certain doom. So it sends blood to our digestive system instead.) When I sit I am, physically speaking, the perfect prey. The very simple physical act of sitting still, the choice to stay still and quiet, the choice to direct my attention solely to the breath is a biological act of bravery and vulnerability, every single time. This was

my first contact, my first act of intimacy. I made contact with vulnerability.

On some level that initial sitting down, whether solitary or in a group, becomes an act of trust. It can be trust in the environment, trust in the facilitator, even trust in myself and my practice. I may trust that no predator will leap out from his hiding place; that no teacher will allow my violation while I stay vulnerable; that regardless of what is going on around me or inside me, I will make the right choice between stillness and movement should the decision become necessary. There is no intimacy, close association, without this trust (or at least the illusion of it.) So when I sit, I extend that trust to others, to myself, to my practice. And I make contact with fear, and then I make contact with trust.

Once the sitting still is accomplished, the bodily sensations arise. I make the choice to allow myself contact with these sensations. Although it sounds elementary, this is no easy task. I am sure that I once experienced bodily sensation freely, as a child, before bodily dissociation during abuse was the only option for psychological (and perhaps physical) survival. But now, slowly, with each session of sitting I have been able to reconnect to my body in a way that does not evoke hatred, shame, self injurious behavior. I have let myself be vulnerable, let myself trust, and so then I am able to feel the sensation of clothing on certain areas of my skin without screaming. I am able to feel itches, tension, and pain in areas of my body that would have once caused violent self harming. The pulling away from these sensations still exists, but I am able to feel THAT in my body as well, long before they transition to sudden or violent reaction. Each session of sitting, although to different degrees, allows me safe contact, close association, familiarity with the bodily manifestations of being a human, a human struggling with PTSD. I am intimate, familiar now, with the havoc that still reverberates in my body after the abuse. Sitting does not make it less painful; sitting cannot erase the felt sense of the abuse that still arises. But, it does allow for safe contact, a full experience of that pain, rather than the habit of dissociation from it.

For me, intimacy, contact, the ability to notice and fully experience the detail—that is what is happening when I sit. Does it extend beyond the cushion, yes sometimes it does. Is contact always easy or pretty or nice or comfortable, no it is not. But, I am interested in contact, not comfort. Contact first and foremost. What that contact looks like cannot be the goal, but the contact itself must be. The very act of intimacy that happens regularly during my meditation, the ACT of contact itself, that opportunity for familiarity with this 5' 4" carcass, that is my goal. Reclaiming an intimate familiarity for a brief moment, that was taken so long ago. What happens when I get up, when I stop sitting? I like to think perhaps the ability to allow contact with the rest of the details of my life. I would like to think that all of the time spent on the cushion allowing myself intimacy with the good, bad, and the ugly that shows up somehow makes it easier to allow similar contact in my daily life. I would like to think that the ability to allow intimacy that I am practicing while meditating just might extend itself beyond that brief practice. I think, maybe, just maybe, it is.

So I will sit. I will practice allowing contact with whatever shows up. And then, I will get up and go live my life, grateful to have had the opportunity to rediscover and cultivate intimacy with that very life. That is, for me, where it must start. Beyond that...I will just have to wait and see.

*

Sensitive to the Whole

I am reconnected to my body
In a way I must have been
When I was seven
Before eight years old
Hands turned cold
And I became frozen
Backed in a corner
Of myself

For survival
One by one pulled out
The cords that connected
Neurons to nerves
But now the stillness
The waiting and watching
The safety of silence
Has allowed a re-wiring
A warm humming of the living
That carries me out of that corner

—April Michelle Dean

Author

April Michelle Dean has her BS in Nursing and a Masters of Applied Meditation Studies. She has worked in the fields of surgery and labor and delivery as a nurse. She is also a veteran of the USAF, who served on active duty, and as a reservist. April has been meditating for 10 years. She has instructed meditation at Penn State Abington, for staff, and Intercommunity Action Center, for adults in the Philadelphia living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. April is a member of the Speakers Bureau at RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network). Currently, she is co-instructing meditation at Beaumont at Bryn Mawr, a retirement community. She is also a contributor at Gravity Network (www.gravity-network.org) a community of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. She is also a writer currently posting poetry to her blog www.sometimesihatemycat.com. Her current area of interest is the intersection between meditation and creativity, as well as the use of meditation in the management of PTSD, and its practical application in the recovery from childhood trauma.

[Online Discussion](#)



SPECULATIVE NON-BUDDHISM

RUINS OF THE BUDDHIST REAL