Beyond Mindfulness:
Western Meditation Techniques in Theory and Practice

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General Theory & Concepts

• Vocabulary:
  ○ Meditation and contemplation.
  ○ Greek theōria and its cognates.
  ○ Latin speculare and its cognates.
  ○ Registering the mind.

• Why go “beyond mindfulness”?
  ○ Concerns from within Buddhism:
    ■ Balance and appropriate context.
    ■ Spiritual bypassing.
  ○ Concerns from contemporary researchers:
    ■ Dissociation.
    ■ The historic context of “no-self.”
  ○ Western traditions and our historical moment:
    ■ Manipulation, “nudging,” etc.
    ■ Active agency within a larger cosmos.

• Some working assumptions:
  ○ Agency (vs. being a patient).
  ○ Activity (vs. passivity).
  ○ Choice (vs. necessity).
  ○ Cosmos (vs. chaos).
  ○ Larger than ourselves (vs. “create your own reality”).

Preliminaries & Modular Tools

• The Cleansing Breath.
• Rhythmic Breathing. The “Four-fold Breath.”
• Backtracking.
Focal Points

• Pythagorean Daily Recollection.
  ○ Rewind your day, from the present moment backwards.
  ○ Emphasize observation, and awareness of patterns (not browbeating or self-flagellation).

• Stoic Pre-Meditation.
  ○ Vividly imagine a possible event (positive & negative, on different days).
  ○ Then ask:
    ▪ What (if any) part of this is up to me?
    ▪ How does this involve or affect my power of choice?
    ▪ Which of my beliefs or judgments are making the situation seem more (un)pleasant?
    ▪ What choices can I make, with regard to how to respond?
  ○ Vividly imagine yourself doing what is in your power, to respond in the best possible way.

• Some Platonic Gymnastics.
  ○ Basic Questions:
    ▪ “If x is the case, what else would have to be the case?”
    ▪ AND “If x is not the case, what else would have to be the case?”
  ○ Begin by defining your terms.
  ○ Note the direction of explanation:
    ▪ Upstream? Downstream? Side-by-side?
  ○ A more complex set of questions:
    ▪ If x is simple, what else would have to be the case?
    ▪ If x is composite (made of many parts), what else would have to be the case?
    ▪ If x is not, what else would have to be the case?

A “Full-on” Structure

1. An opening prayer/ritual.
2. Posture and relaxation.
4. The main event/focal point.
5. Space for contemplation.
7. A closing prayer/ritual.