

POPP: Pause, Observe, Process, Practice

1 Pause: This is where the red flag goes up, alarms go off, bells ring, and warning lights flash -"Houston, we have a problem!". Sometimes we have to hit a bottom before we can really stop our incessant running from pain and after pleasures. This is really the pause that refreshes. We literally take a breather and catch our breath. An old song advises us to "Check yourself before you wreck yourself!". Here we create a gap in our usual storyline and do what we tell our dog to do when danger is near - sit, stay, heel! So often lost in past fears and future worries we come back to the present moment and situation. Our presence and mindfulness deepens as we step away from doing, striving, acquiring, and achieving into simply *being* in the here and now.

We take the time to "be still and know". Know what? The infinite peace, power, presence, and wisdom of the universe. We make a gap in the incessant chatter of our minds. Walking meditation can be very helpful here as we slow down from flying about at hundreds of miles an hour, and racing around at a mile a minute, to be slowed to a mindful and possibly pleasant walking pace until we may come to a stop physically and mentally in sitting meditation. Too often our minds are days, months, and miles away in past and future concerns, fears, and worries.

2 Observe/Open: Here again we take a step back from our story and ourselves but this time as an observer. We do our best to open up our minds and hearts to our immediate environment, ourselves, others, and our present situation. We try to look deeply, listen deeply, and feel deeply what is going on in our bodies and minds. We focus our attention and concentrate on the present moment to seek clarity for our anxieties, discomfort, pain, and suffering. We take time to ponder the possibilities, and consider the options and choices. Here we do what we tell our children to do before crossing the street; "stop, look, listen". This is the discovery phase of our healing as we follow feelings, emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and opinions to their root causes.

We seek truth, honesty, and authenticity. We engage with our body and mind, as well as spirit, and soul. We now face down our demons and dragons, giants and ghosts. We also face our "negative" fears and emotions such as anger, jealousy, and hate, as well as depression, loneliness, and despair. All of these are crying out to us like a tired, sick, or wounded child. Our body cries out as well, all too often ignored and abused by us and others. It has much to tell us as mental dis-ease and dysfunction eventually manifest physically. We often find these seeds and roots are years, decades, or centuries old, handed down from ancestors, cultures, societies, and others.

We do our best to look past the blaming, shaming, and meanness in ourselves and others to the pain and suffering buried within. This is real communication; communing deeply with ourselves and others. This is a good time for prayer and meditation if we are willing to touch into the infinite power, presence, and wisdom in our depths. Just looking and listening deeply may be all that is needed to calm and soothe the suffering in ourselves and others. We listen without judgment, criticism, or correction. If we are focused on ourselves, we accept our feelings as they are with unconditional love. If the focus is on others, we let them know we are there for them now, that we care.

We are often wise to listen to others without comment, especially if we hear blame, wrong thinking and accusations except perhaps to apologize for not listening and understanding better in the past. This is true compassion. Hours or days later when the heat of the moment has passed we might be able to give helpful insights without activating our own pain and making things worse. Too often we double pain through judgment and ridicule of ourselves and others. This adds insult on top of injury, so should be carefully to avoid. Here we dismantle our grievances and storylines to see what truth and falsehoods they contain.

We use tender loving care as we embrace the hurt and suffering child within as well as other critical inner voices of the past. We realize it is all in its essence simply energy, and energy which can be harnessed for higher purposes and use. Attention is energy, so the light of awareness relaxes our problems to allow enlightenment and transformation. Here we are wise to exercise "appropriate attention" in the direction of understanding and working with difficulties rather than trying to fight or overcome them through resistance and struggle.

We also must keep awareness of positive energies, seeds, and situations we may nurture to enable us to handle and resolve negative ones. It is all too easy to focus entirely on problems, hatred, and negativity in the world. Instead we take time to be aware of the wonders of life, our bodies, homes, communities, and our world. Mindfulness gets us in touch with the miracles and wonders of life in us and around us. Look and listen deeply - sit with it - and find the peace that passes understanding.

3 Process: Here is where the power of concentration and caring we have exercised naturally leads to insight and understanding, then healing and transformation. This is the white flag of surrender as we let go of all we have been clinging to for so long. Caring, compassion and forgiveness overcome judgment and negativity, and acceptance overcomes resistance. We don't condone bad behavior, but we work with it from a completely new and fresh perspective. We dismantle our grievances to find common ground upon which to stand. Here we release the energy by writing it out, painting it out, dancing it out, shouting it out, or whatever avenue is needed, We look for full and meaningful relief that burns miseries without causing further misery.

We may now remove the masks, armor, boots, and bandages to tend the often ancient and festering wounds of ourselves and others. There is much stored in our unconscious; seeds of joy and happiness, and of pain and suffering. What we feed grows, good or bad. Yet even seemingly bad energies such as anger, shame, and jealousy can be used to learn and improve. Here we may wish to count our blessings and practice gratitude. For example, just opening up our eyes, we see a rainbow of colors and a kaleidoscope of shapes and forms in every moment, even when sleeping in dreams. Should we choose to cook up a fragrant and tasty meal, we may enjoy a banquet of sensational smells, and taste a feast of fabulous flavors.

4 Practice: We now...

Just listen and you will hear a symphony of sounds such as birds singing, talking, traffic, or rain falling. Perhaps better yet, find a radio or concert and be swooned by a man made symphony of melodious music. We have hands that can work, play, or simply hold our pets and loved ones, and legs take us everywhere we wish to go and let us dance our cares away. All of this is here for us every day of our lives if we take the time to pay attention and enjoy them. Embrace suffering with loving kindness and compassion. Practice good self care and care for others. Bring up and nourish seeds of goodness, and let problematic ones wither.

Practice/Proceed: Here is where the rubber meets the road, "off the (meditation) mat" as we act on and implement our insights, inspirations, and intentions. Taking it to the streets and to our homes, schools, businesses, stores, etc; everywhere we go and interact with others and our world. Here we are challenged to walk what we talk, and exercise the courage of our convictions. We have been seeking the best in ourselves and others, and now we act on what we have found.

This is the practice side of our journey as we pause, open, observe, process, and practice moment to moment in all of our affairs. Eastern wisdom calls this moving meditation, others seek to "pray without ceasing" as we get in the flow of higher law and greater good, and do our best to be God's eyes and ears, hands and feet, heart mid, spirit and soul. We do our best to look and listen with love, and then speak and act with loving kindness. No matter how difficult or challenging persons or situations may be, we try to have everything we say or do come from our deepest and divine center and source. The running and hiding is over. It is time to live the large and in charge life for which we were intended.

"We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival". Churchill

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