

Chapter Five

Meditations Throughout the Day

Morning meditations integrate the wisdom of sleep and dreams into waking consciousness and support grounding, protective energy. Practicing morning meditations allows us to start the day both rooted firmly in earthly reality, and spiritually connected to our higher senses. However, as the day gets underway, the busyness and distractions of school can easily untether us from the grounding and spiritual connectedness created by morning meditations.

Continuing to practice meditations throughout the day can help keep us grounded and connected as we teach. The following meditations are easy to use in moments of chaos, confusion, or conflict to bring clarity, energy, and enlightenment into teaching.

Sun Shower Meditation

I used the sun shower meditation often when my second class was in first grade. The sun shower meditation is quick and simple and brings peace, joy, and rejuvenation into any and every moment.

Guiding and forming first graders into capable students with healthy habits and good manners, can be an exhausting undertaking. As young students build up their bodily strength and physical energy, the teacher gives their own life force to help them grow. Pausing to connect to the spiritual world rejuvenated my spirit and helped me teach with energy, joy and enthusiasm despite the physically and energetically draining nature of this work.

I learned this meditation from Linda Bergh, a guest presenter during my training at Great Lakes Waldorf Institute. Linda's life story had a profound impact on me, and this exercise deeply imprinted in my memory. Though it is extremely quick and simple, it yields bountiful, spiritual support. After forgetting about it for several years, it resurfaced in my conscious mind at just the right moment. To this day it is one of my favorite contemplative exercises.

Take a step back against a wall or into a corner where you cannot be seen by others

around you. Fold your arms across your chest and close your eyes. Imagine the sun directly above your head flooding golden light down into the crown of your head and filling your entire being. This light is inspiration, clarity of thought, strength, and protection. As you step back into the material world, the light remains glowing around you, influencing your thoughts and words and calming your mind.

I used this exercise when I had a moment to step away from my class, but also in front of my class as I waited for their quiet attention. Rather than shouting, counting, or writing names on a naughty list, I would stand silently at the front of the room with my arms crossed over my chest, sometimes with my eyes closed, and I would imagine a waterfall of golden energy enveloping me with glittering golden light that coated my whole being and activated my mind and my spiritual sight.

This always worked to quiet my first graders. Eventually every student would be standing silently, with their arms folded like mine. Sometimes it took seconds, and other times, a few minutes, but I didn't mind how long it took. As I waited, I was fortified by the spiritual world. When we were eventually ready to move on as a class, we were united with a spirit of groundedness, interest, and intrigue.

The students were curious about what I was doing and eager to join in and see what might come next. Sometimes I slowly lifted myself up onto my tip toes and then back down over and over as I waited for them. This always caught their eyes and made them want to do it too. I grew in patience throughout the exercise because I was giving myself a moment to breathe and relax as I waited for their attention.

It is in such moments of stillness, when we pause and quiet our minds rather than reacting emotionally to exterior stimuli, that we cultivate inner peace and balance, which sets the tone for the climate of the class. Holding emotional balance in the midst of outward chaos is what Steiner referred to as inner equanimity.

Equanimity

Recently, I was sitting in East Holistic Reflexology in Carlsbad, California. My happy place. Their foot reflexology services take place in a big, quiet, peaceful room full of wide, fabric recliners with soft, meditative music playing. Their foot massages are truly a decadent experience.

After being ushered to a seat, you are covered with a warm blanket, eyes draped with a soft, lavender-scented cloth, and feet submerged in a barrel of hot water as your chairback is reclined. The treatment starts with a neck and scalp massage and then progresses to a

forty-five-minute foot and leg massage with acupressure and reflexology.

I was about halfway into one such treatment and drifting into an altered state of total peace and relaxation, my consciousness hovering somewhere between waking and sleeping, my physical body melting, all tension and stress evaporating like mist, when I realized that at some point during my half-conscious drifting, another person had been escorted in and placed beside me. I was not aware of her presence until she started coughing.

It was not the kind of cough that comes from a sudden dry patch in the back of your throat, or one that could be mitigated with a drink of water. It was a deep, phlegmy cough that made the woman gag as she choked and hacked. Her nose rattled and gurgled with congestion. She breathed dryly through her open mouth. She crinkled opened a cough drop and clattered it around against her teeth as she tried to suck it without closing her lips.

I was now fully conscious and far from relaxed. I was painfully aware of the proximity of our chairs and began to perceive that every time she coughed, she was turning her head toward me. I began to wonder if there was someone on her other side who she was trying to avoid coughing on. Had she come with a friend who she was courteously steering her germs away from?

I stretched my neck to the side, craning my head as far from her as I could. As my neck cricked painfully,

my mind became consumed with solving the mystery of why she would be coughing directly at me. On went the coughing, snuffling, mouth-breathing, and cough drop clattering, and on went my resentful thoughts as I grew more and more tense next to her.

I tried to pull my eye covering further down over my nose and mouth. I could feel the warm wind of her mouth-breathing on my neck. My shoulders began to lift higher and higher towards my ears as my tension grew. The relaxation of the massage that had so completely melted my senses away just moments before was now completely gone.

Equanimity is a simple word, but its meaning contains within it the vastness of variation of human faults and flaws. There are so many ways that our human nature thwarts our spiritual development. Not only do anger and violence interfere with the process of our spiritual maturation, but so do judgment, disdain, disgust, indignation, and offense. All negative feelings cloud our ability to perceive higher truths and see the true essence of the *other*. When negative feelings sweep us up in their whirlwind of emotion, we lose the ability to remain grounded and aware of the goodness of other human beings.

Even though most of us have gone to the grocery store, or the movie theater, or flown on a plane when we were sick, or taken a child to one of these places even though they were sick, it is, nevertheless, difficult not to cast a shade of judgment upon others who do the same.

Most of us are offended by other people's germs, and other people's kids' germs, more than our own. In these moments of extreme disgust or offense, can we find the sliver of good? Can we remain grounded in our sameness with the other rather than automatically elevating ourselves above those around us?

Everyday life gives us ample opportunity to confront our own judgement, anger, irritation, and indignation with other people. One need only get behind the wheel during rush hour, or go to the grocery store after work, to be reminded with vivid clarity of the inconvenience of society and humanity in it. But Steiner suggested that in every situation inner peace and calm can be cultivated.

Tending to be an emotional person with an occasionally hot temper, I found that in my early years of teaching, my moods often swelled and plunged on the sea of emotional highs and lows that so often accompany the life of a teacher.

On any given day teachers may encounter angry, worried, frustrated, and indignant parents, unsupportive colleagues or administrators, disorganization in school leadership, conflicts amongst students, injuries, illnesses, and disruptive or disrespectful behavior. Meeting unexpected emotional events with grace, calm, and level-headedness is as important as it is difficult.

We learn from Steiner that holding inner equanimity tempers intense emotions like anger, impatience, judgement, and irritation, which block our spiritual develop-

ment. Quietude, patience, and gentleness are required for the unfolding of higher perceptions.

If we are to cultivate higher senses with which to observe our students and cultivate deep compassion and understanding for them, it is vital that we maintain equanimity in the face of unexpected occurrences. Even troubling or disrespectful behavior from students, or interpersonal conflict amongst faculty or class families.

Equanimity can be called upon during an emotional conflict by making space to pause, step back, and reflect on what is happening. It will be easier to draw on this capacity in high intensity situations if one has begun to practice equanimity in quiet meditative moments. When life is relatively calm, we must practice even-temperedness, balancing the day-to-day highs and lows so that we are more able to face extreme or unexpected highs or lows.

Through the practice of equanimity, we begin to realize that feelings are not a reflection of reality, but rather, a reaction to reality. This means that they can be controlled by choice. Cultivating equanimity will help when unexpected hardships and trials come into our lives. If we are prone to extreme highs and lows based on the unpredictable events of life, we will find ourselves tossed endlessly on a sea of chaos, at the mercy of “good” and “bad” events that we cannot control. But if we can consciously regulate our emotional reactions, even being coughed on in the middle of a massage will not have the power to control our inner or outer attitudes.

Take a moment to reflect on your emotional reactions to everyday life. Does your adrenaline spike when someone cuts you off in traffic? Do you get a thrill of excitement when someone compliments your post on social media? Imagine a moment in the past when you had a strong emotional reaction, either positive, or negative. As you note the feeling, make the decision to temper it. Dispel the feeling and return to balanced calm even as you imaginatively remember the event or situation that caused the intense feeling. Whether it was a good or bad feeling, remember that all feelings pass. Negative feelings fade as reliably as positive ones. There is nothing to be gained from living into either positive or negative feelings which are fleeting. Carry this feeling of calm, inner balance into your life as a teacher during the school day and in your personal life outside of school. Instead of celebrating choosing the fast line at the grocery store, or cursing the person who stole your parking spot, stay open to what the situation might present for your personal growth with a calm attitude. Over time, practicing non-reaction

*will build within you a character of grace
and peace.*

In my early years of teaching, when I first began to work with equanimity, I realized that I had been allowing an assault of random, anxious, and judgmental thoughts to move unbidden through my mind, spiking my adrenaline and causing my stomach to churn with irritation at every failure, and soar with pride at every success. My emotions and mood vacillated from extreme highs to extreme lows from moment to moment.

When we are not in control of our own emotions, we are passive receivers of whatever emotion comes at us. Equanimity allows us to hold all events and emotions with balance as we logically consider the most appropriate and effective way to respond. This practice goes hand in hand with the practice of positivity because in the space of pausing to strive for balance, we create room for compassion and understanding to arise within us towards even the most seemingly negative person or situation.

We realize that mentally villainizing others, whether they cut us off in traffic, criticize our work, speak rudely, act aggressively, or are openly sick in public, will not bring us any closer to inner peace, or happiness as teachers or human beings. Rather, as Waldorf teachers, we are called to see below the surface of negative or challenging

behavior from colleagues, students, parents, and even strangers, and find the sliver of goodness in them.

Positivity

“If we are to practice loving, we must learn to see what is worthy of love within friends, strangers, and even enemies.”

Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry*

The meditative practice of positivity is grounded in Rudolf Steiner’s declaration in *How to Know Higher Worlds* that “in every evil we must seek out the elements in it that allow us to transform it into something good.”²³ As we cultivate positivity in all circumstances, towards all people, the capacity to maintain equanimity strengthens, and greater emotional balance is achieved.

To see people through the lens of positivity, we must try to imagine life from another’s perspective, even if they are an adversary, and try to find the positive motivation that lies behind their behavior.

Focus on someone you are having difficulties with. Consider the problematic aspects of the relationship. It may help to form an imagination of the person’s physical being and see the problematic behavior as a color-

ful light within them. Imagine the color being lifted out and neutralized with healing white light, like an illness being removed. Look beyond their dis-ease of criticism, selfishness, unkindness, or laziness that is afflicting them. Try to see beyond the affliction and see the good in that person's being, which has been clouded by the dis-ease infecting your relationship with them. What sliver of good might be motivating their outwardly problematic behavior? See the vulnerable human behind the behavior. With some it may be difficult, but in the end, you will find the good even in those who seem to strongly oppose you or wish for your failure. When you find the good and the vulnerable within them, hold onto it. Wish them peace, health, and joy in life. Practice loving kindness toward them in your meditation. Don't let any injustice blind you to the good that exists within each person.

Over time, little by little, the teacher who practices positivity towards all their students and all their students' parents, will find they are better able to meet each student's and each parent's needs with love and compassion. They will not be clouded by students' or parents' shortcomings or irritating behavior. This is because

the teacher who cultivates inner positivity will be supported, and even celebrated, by the spiritual world for striving in the direction of care and compassion through positivity. Positivity is perhaps the most important meditation for teachers to use when building healthy relationships with their students.

Due to seen and unseen factors, teachers connect more easily with some students, and less easily with others. And often there are one or two students that a teacher finds truly vexing. But it is within these troubling relationships that a profound opportunity lies. In meditating on students and noticing negative feelings that arise regarding certain students, teachers acknowledge and release negative feelings, turning instead to a sense of curiosity. In this way, the practice of positivity can transform a teacher's feelings toward even their most challenging students.

A Note About "Difficult" Students

Most teachers have at least one student that stands out as particularly challenging. This student may not be the worst behaved student, or even exhibit poor behavior at all. Sometimes a teacher and a student fail to connect because of intangible, unseen, relational chemistry between the teacher and student.

When a student is particularly challenging to a teacher, the teacher who does not access spiritual know-

ing through contemplative practices, has limited options. They can ignore the irritation, suffering through the negative feelings towards the child in order to bear the relationship, counting down the days until the student moves on. Or they can address their frustrations by trying to change the student's behavior. The problem with these two possibilities, either trying to make the child change, or trying to ignore inner negative feelings towards the child, is that neither addresses the deeper spiritual dynamics at play that are causing the teacher's negative feelings.

A self-aware teacher may attempt to rise above their personal feelings towards the child. But rising above feelings of irritation, while noble, does not solve the problem of disconnection between the teacher and their irritating student. The true essence of the conflict must be understood in order to transform it into new life in the relationship and true enjoyment of the child. To this end, the contemplative teacher will ask themselves, *why does this child irritate me*, and in the asking they will also know that they cannot answer the question on their own.

At first look, it seems that a child's irritating behavior is what causes feelings of annoyance. But as we look deeper, we realize that the teacher's reaction to the student is dependent on the teacher's own inner mood and attitude. Whether or not a teacher can look to the irritating child with curiosity about their behavior has to do

more with the teacher's interior life, than anything to do with the student.

Just as in the practice of equanimity, the teacher must look first to their own inner mood and strive to temper it with grace and calm while considering an appropriate response, it is the same with cultivating positivity towards difficult students. Rather than reacting to behaviors or trying to make the child change, through contemplative practices, teachers lean into each relationship and uncover the hidden reasons within themselves for their feelings of frustration or irritation. Once the true root cause of the feeling is discovered, negative feelings can be transformed into compassion and understanding for the previously irritating child.

As a teacher practices positive thinking throughout the day and especially when mentally beholding a student who is challenging them, they begin to transform the relationship. Positivity, like all the meditations and contemplations discussed in this book first works to shift the mindset of the person struggling with negative thoughts. As the teacher shifts their own negative feeling towards the so-called difficult child into a feeling of compassion and interest, something in the relationship transforms too.

Because relationships are made up of aspects of each person's mood and attitude, the relationship cannot stay the same if even one person changes. Thus, the teacher can change the entire relational dynamic by changing their own thoughts and feelings about it. This is the es-

sential piece of teacher meditations. As teachers practice contemplative practices throughout the school day, they continue to stay aware of the flow of thoughts that influence their mood and form their reality and the reality of their class.

In the next chapter we will explore meditative practices for the evening. These practices serve first, to release the emotional energy accumulated throughout the school day; second, to usher in reflection and realization through imaginatively recalling the events of the day and the relational interactions that unfolded within it; and third, to prepare the conscious mind to move into the mysterious world of sleep and dreams.