

NOTHING

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Nothing is easy. Even trying to write about it can be a daunting task, but here goes... First, try to join with me in my dilemma:

Imagine a life where there is nothing to be known. Imagine emptiness and space. It is hard for us to think of nothing. For example, imagine in the next moment if I were to give you the task "Think of nothing for the next little while. Let's see how long you can go without something coming into your mind." Let's try that as an exercise, okay? So in the next 15 seconds, close your eyes and try to think of nothing. Start now.....

Well, what happened?

I don't know about you, but I was running the word "nothing, nothing, nothing" through my head. So I was still thinking of something, even though I was trying to think of nothing. I think probably many of you had similar experiences.

If you are like most people, it seems virtually impossible to maintain a state of Nothingness. For some it is intolerable, because the absence of thought exposes them to an unusual state of emptiness, the Void, and they almost wonder where their sense of meaning, connection, or identity went. For others, the frustration of trying to empty the mind and keep it empty of thought is just too difficult... and they just quit trying. Too bad. They are just so close to a major breakthrough, through the gateway to the zone of Nothing.

Nothing, or the state of mind that embraces No-thing, is a key factor of mental fitness. It is practical and useful. Although intangible, the state of Nothing allows you to lower stress and increase focus and awareness of yourself and what is important in your environment. Furthermore, it is the gateway to the ultimate getaway to inner peace, the path to the centre of your spiritual self, or even loss of self in the experience of unity with the universe.

Some people say they can have this experience by involvement with sports, or running, or hiking in the mountains. But what about the vast majority of times when a 45 minute break is too

disruptive, or when the very scheduling of these activities adds even more time pressure to our crowded lives?

At that point it might be useful and practical to develop the first skill of Nothing, the ability to empty the mind of thought.

Nothing is the ability to truly empty our minds of preconceptions. To respond to the patterns of possibility that lie within us, before us, and around us. Nothing is a state of receptivity that allows us to easily receive whatever is offered to us, including a state of peace in the eye of a hurricane of activity around us, and the seemingly ceaseless stream of thoughts that clutter consciousness.

The peace itself is rewarding enough, but more important still is that beyond peace is the prospect of receiving Grace. Grace is the goodness and emotional support that is freely available to all of us, if we merely allow it to happen, with the appreciation of emptiness. This aspect is known by listening to the spaces between the notes in music, enjoying the relaxing between the flexing and contraction of muscles, seeing the spaces and shadows in paintings and pictures, and cherishing what is eluded as well as what is included, what is not evident but implied. It is the appreciation of understatement, Quiet Quality.

To receive this element of self-esteem, we need to create space

and emptiness to prepare the state of reception. Create silence, enjoy space. This means simplicity in lifestyle, surrender of many unnecessary attachments to property and objects, the elimination of clutter in many aspects of our lives, and above all, time and attention to Nothing, an appreciation of the eternal Now in our lives.

It is the creation of a temple for being, rather than a gym for becoming. While it does not preclude improvement, development is not its primary object, the main focus is the process of being-here-now.

How can this happen? How can this seemingly impossible state be approached? Well, likely a good approach would involve making time for Nothing in your life. Start with 20 waking minutes of every day dedicated to Nothing: the emptying of your mind. It doesn't have to be 20 consecutive minutes, although that would be even better. Perhaps it would be easier to begin by just taking a few short moments several times a day, so that the total comes to at least 20 minutes.

There are several brief exercises or practices that can assist your skills in Nothing at various points in the day, to blank or erase your mind. For example, in preparing for a project, you might want to remove your mind of clutter, just as you can clear your desk of files and papers when you have something you really want to focus on and get done.

One of the shortest and simplest methods for clearing your mind goes like this:

Imagine the clutter of recurring thoughts as if they are a series of words that are written on a blackboard. Now imagine that a person, perhaps you, perhaps someone else, is going up to the blackboard with a brush, or a cloth or sponge eraser, and now is erasing the chalk on the blackboard. And they may be even wiping it down so there isn't even a trace left of where the chalk was. And that can happen on a traditional blackboard or that can happen on a chartboard where you use felt pens on a white surface. So go ahead and imagine some kind of message like that. And you're taking a cloth and you're just wiping that message all the way out. As new thoughts come to mind, they appear as words, and the words are being wiped clean. Now the words are being erased even before they can be fully written. You are left staring at a blank, empty, board...Nothing.

Another way to engage the experience of Nothing in your mind, especially when you are bothered by a visual image or sequence, is:

Imagine that you're having a full colour image of being in this room, and actually it is an image in **a T.V. monitor** that is the size of this room, and now you're turning down the saturation of color, so it is getting closer and closer to greys, whites and blacks. You're turning down the sound so it is quieter and quieter. Yes. And you're turning down the contrast so even the greys

and the whites and blacks become even greyer and greyer and the outlines are starting to vanish and disappear. That's it. And now all form is gone completely. You allow yourself to enjoy the comfort of staring at a blank screen for a little while...

Just looking at Nothing...

Another exercise for moving the mind into Nothing is imagining that there's a really **solid green billiard ball** in the farthest corner of the room. And you're looking at it, and you're looking at the highlights of the lighting in the room on the glossy side of the billiard ball. And the contours of that ball, ...and now that billiard ball is becoming larger, about the size of a tennis ball, and as it becomes larger, the colour is less saturated, less bright, and the texture is not as hard. It is softer, almost like a tennis ball, only one without any ribbing or markings. Now imagine it is the size of a basketball but still a pale green colour, perhaps a very pale jade green, even a greenish white. Now imagine that ball is becoming as big as a medicine ball, quite big. And now it is so big it is obscuring the corner and even parts of the wall, parts of the ceiling and the floor. It is getting larger and larger. And this is only an exercise so allow yourself to relax and feel comfortable as that ball gets larger and larger. So finally the whole sense of where the floor is, and the sides and anything else in the room dissolve into nothing but very pale green.... and finally it is all around you and the green has become so pale it is almost like a greyish-white. The pale white is so absorbing that it is like a dense fog, so that you can hardly see your arms, and everything else has blended into the dreamy mist of serenity... and Nothing. Just feeling the sense of Nothing all around you and within you...

All of these exercises were examples of clearing the mind, or allowing the mind to become interested in one thing only, to the exclusion of everything else. Eventually that one thing becomes **so indistinct that it approaches the experience of absorption into Nothing**. And it is so nice to leave the outside world behind and be totally absorbed in your experience....

In addition to these methods, there are many other guided meditations that can help assist you to clear your mind into a state of Nothing.

There is a neurological basis or correlate of this state.^{2 [2]} It is the turning down or silencing a part of the brain called the posterior superior parietal lobe. By turning down the flow of incoming sensory information that clutters our ordinary thinking, this part of the brain goes silent. It is this part that keeps us bounded in space and aware of our separateness from other things and people. So when this part goes silent, we have the subjective feeling of being “one with the universe.” Mystical meditators and yogis often describe this nirvana state as “the art of union with reality.”

The meditation on Nothing can extend beyond these mental methods **into an entire lifestyle and philosophy**. Think about it: less is better. Desiring what you already have could lead to greater enjoyment of life. Think of simplicity as creating space for a more holistic and sustainable paradigm of Quality. In the space of a simpler life, perhaps then we could expand the threshold of Nothing to widen our access to the expansion of consciousness. This practice would allow us to discover one of the ultimate frontiers, the exploration of Inner Space.

And to think, it all started from Nothing....

^{2 [2]} Newberg, A., D’Aquili, E., & Rause, V. (2001) Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain science and the biology of belief. New York: Ballantine.