

Sittin'-in-the-Waves: A Practice of Truly Embodying Mindfulness

I've just returned from sittin'-in-the-waves, a meditation practice that came to me out of nowhere a little over a year ago. Different from surfing, swimming or boogie-boarding, this practice is focused on *being* rather than *doing* in the water. The action is, well, simply sitting in the waves. The intention is to rest in a steadiness of awareness in the midst of ever-changing, completely unpredictable conditions, which are affecting all the senses, body position and balance simultaneously. The effects are multi-faceted; here are a few:

- ~~ In-the-moment laughter and exhilaration that comes with the realization of it's all just energy moving through ... and then the realization that it's ALL just energy moving through ... experiencing "fun" in profundity;
- ~~ A sustained body-sense awareness of a "keel" that allows movement with energy and circumstances, while providing an ever-present balance point of resiliency ... the experience of being grounded even in fluidity;
- ~~ A sense of sacred attunement with all that is happening as it is happening and expanded awareness of being connected to all that is here.

The teachings that emerge in this practice are phenomenal (literally and figuratively). Some that have come to me are:

- ~~ What looks like it's going to slam you often loses its momentum before it arrives;
- ~~ A sense of steadiness can be present even when the sand/earth is moving beneath you;
- ~~ There is a sweet spot between rigidity and collapsibility (between being a rock and seaweed) that allows engagement without overwhelm;
- ~~ Having awareness of the body's contraction followed by the mind's reaction (e.g., when a big wave is seen building in the distance) invites the option of surrender and the practice of equanimity. [Refer back to the first teaching for assistance in letting all these sensations go.];
- ~~ Even if you're slammed, shoved, spun-around or splashed, it's just energy moving through ... and it all passes.

There's another thing that happens when we let ourselves truly fall into this practice: a profound attunement with (or through) the ocean. This expansion of consciousness moves the experience beyond being inspired by the water into opening to the realization that it is part of you. For me, this usually moves through 3 stages:

- ~~ First, from the shore, before entering the waves, I'm usually aware of a 3rd person perspective: looking at and admiring the water, the scenery, the sounds, the smells. This is a very pleasant experience of I-It.
- ~~ Next, I greet the ocean, make an offering of gratitude, and, sometimes, voice a request for a teaching. As I enter to about waist-deep and feel "the mood" of the sea that day, I drop into a sort of energetic dance, letting myself be moved with and by the current, sensing the enjoyment of the beauty, sounds, tastes and feel of it. I continue with this "partnering", this resonance, until there is a strong sense of connection, of an I-Thou relationship with the water.
- ~~ Then, I let myself be guided by the current back towards the shore, into the shallows, where I can sit about waist-deep in a meditation posture. Bringing my attention to the body's center of gravity – the hara -- I breathe and focus my energy there. To help focus awareness, I may first concentrate on one aspect of what I'm sensing ... it could be listening to the song of the waves, watching the play of light and reflections, feeling the coldness of water on my face and the warmth of the water in my wetsuit. Gradually, without judging or labelling, I add another dimension of sensing, of abiding in what is happening as it is happening. On and on and on ... all the while, being willing to sit back up if knocked over, to bring my focus to the present moment if predicting, ... letting myself be as is, letting the ocean be as is, letting everything be as is until there is no separation, no difference, no gap ... just being, just here, just now, in I-I relationship ... that is, until the "scooter waves" distract me with their hidden power, and I laugh as I'm pushed backwards, and then just drop-in again.
- ~~ As in yoga and many meditation practices, I close my sittin'-in-the-waves with a very deep bow – a realization of humility and an expression of profound gratitude. What a miracle is this being; what a miracle is this awareness; what a miracle is this living, of attuning to all that's here.