

Meditation and Mortality: Practice and Parkinson's- Posted February 5, 2010 on "The Meditative Life," a blog for *Psychology Today*.

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The diagnosis came a few months ago; I had stage one Parkinson's disease. The most prominent symptom was a persistent resting tremor in my right hand. I had been meditating for many years, and now I was experiencing firsthand the ways in which meditation and a chronic medical condition can intersect.

I started my meditation practice in my usual way with the cultivation of humility, reverence, and calm. I slowly opened and closed my unsettled hand in synchrony with my shallow breathing. The tremor in my right hand gradually slowed as my meditation deepened and my awareness widened. The movements of my body associated with Parkinson's became smaller and ultimately stopped. The jitters that accompany me during the day had finally ceased, and I found a place of rest and ease. I welcomed the silent spacious calm. It seemed as if a whole day's agitation slid from my body.

Then, taking up a line of poetry as the focus for a concentration practice, I noted that my hand began to tremor once again. Returning to spacious awareness, the tremor disappeared. I have noted the difference consistently over recent weeks. Concentration practices stimulate the tremor whereas a practice of deep, silent, open awareness calms it.

Meditation is not something apart from life, but firmly anchored in it. If we are ill, stressed, or distraught, meditation will meet each of these and we learn the ways in which practice and life can shape each other. In my case, open-awareness meditation has not only stilled the tremor in my hand for a short time, but it has helped me to carry the prognosis and changes in my life. Each day is more valued than the one before, each meeting with a friend is heightened and intensified. It has become clear to me that meditation and mortality are well-acquainted with one another, and that the profound calm at the heart of meditation is also courage before the challenges of life.