

## An Excerpt from The Art of Contemplation

### *a gentle path to wholeness and prosperity*

By Richard Rudd

### How to Contemplate

The actual process of contemplation is pure simplicity, although over time it reveals layer upon layer of depth and nuance. The three techniques in this book will take us into the process in some depth. Essentially, we begin our contemplation by focusing our awareness on something.

If we are contemplating a challenge, then we focus on the resolution of the challenge. We hold that goal for as long as we can and when our awareness drifts away, we simply keep bringing it gently back again. There should be no tension in this process. If your life draws you away from the subject, that is fine. You can continue your contemplation later when you remember to. This unforced approach works extremely well over a period of time, because your awareness can follow its own inner rhythms.

Once begun, contemplation never ends. It goes on all the time even when we do not realise it. The more often we return to the subject of our contemplation, the deeper it enters into our unconscious mind. It even enters into our dream life. We simply contemplate whenever we feel like contemplating. That is the whole practice. If you are able to set aside a specific time each day for contemplation, that will greatly enhance the results. In the beginning, you will probably find that your focus regularly drifts away from the subject, and at the end of the day you may have only spent a short time consciously contemplating.

There are also certain times of the day that lend themselves more easily to the contemplative state. When we first wake up and before we go to sleep are examples of such times. We can take full advantage of these times when our awareness naturally turns inwards. Over time we will also find that we become more conscious of our inner state even during busy times of the day. This can really change the manner in which we approach the many tasks that each day brings us. We find that more and more breath enters into the fabric of our life, and even things we previously considered dull or monotonous begin to take on a new kind of shine.

## The First Technique - Pausing

Once we have determined what kind of mystery we want to unlock, we need to create the right conditions for contemplation to occur. This requires that we cultivate a sense of spaciousness in our life. It is as though we have a pebble and we are going to drop that pebble into a large pool of water and examine the nature of its ripples. If the water is rough and disturbed, we won't have a clear view in which to see the ripples.

Pausing is the easiest of the three techniques in this book. The good news is that once you have mastered the art of pausing, the following techniques will come far more easily to you, so it is worth spending some time with it. It is also a wonderful technique in its own right. Done regularly, it can transform a person's whole life.

Think about the day you had yesterday. Try and recall some of the events that took place and then think about its overall feeling. When you came to the end of the day, how did you feel? Many of us get to the end of the day and just collapse onto the sofa or into bed without a sense of the day that we just had. As you learn the art of pausing, your days will begin to feel very different. They will expand as though you are somehow pumping more time and space into them. You will also gain a wider sense of perspective on your life.

Rather than simply hurtling through your day, you will see where it fits into a wider pattern, and this will give you an increased sense of patience and ease. You will begin to remember a fundamental life truth: If you push against the current, you will end up exhausted. Whereas if you find your own natural, harmonic rhythm, things will operate far more efficiently all around you.

The technique of pausing leads us to a wonderful paradox – the more we slow down, the more life appears to expand. In other words, the more frequently we learn to pause and take a breath, the more space we feel and the clearer our mind becomes. This lucid mind can then make clear and unhurried decisions throughout our day.

## Harvesting Pauses

The technique of pausing involves nothing more than noticing life's natural pauses and then simply enjoying them. Everything in nature pauses. If you watch any bird, animal or insect, you will see it regularly pause for no apparent reason. Actually, there are many reasons for pausing. When you stop in your particular activity, you become more aware of your environment. You also become more aware of your *inner* environment. You may suddenly realise you are tired, or that your mind was spinning, or that your breathing has become shallow and laboured. Pauses like this often invite a physical sigh, as the body remembers to draw a deep breath and let go of some tension.

The first stage of the technique of pausing therefore involves finding and spotting the natural pauses that open up before you each day. Once you notice them, you can harvest them like fresh apples picked from the bough. Pauses are here to be enjoyed.

How long is a pause? A pause can be as short as a single breath or it can be much longer. You can begin this technique by finding as many short pauses in your day as you can.

For example, when you are sitting looking at your screen, perhaps answering an email or a text, before you rush from one response to the next, try taking a few breaths between each one and perhaps look up and take in the environment around you. Another example might be when you are in your car and you get to the traffic lights just as they turn red. Instead of feeling frustrated or irritated, you could look at it another way. Life has just gifted you a pause. In that pause you can enter the field of contemplation.

These very simple techniques can have far-reaching effects in your life. A day filled with pauses is a calm and measured day. Nothing ever becomes overwhelming or causes you too much stress.

What's more, when you get to the end of such a day, even though your body may be tired, your mind will still feel clear and uncluttered, leading to a deep sleep and a fine morning the following day.

## Unexpected Pauses

When viewed in a certain way, life can be seen as very playful. We often find ourselves in the middle of an important task when all of a sudden something interrupts us. Although we may be irritated at having our rhythm broken or our plans thwarted, we may in time learn to see such disturbances as gifts. Every break in the flow is in fact a part of a wider flow, and this is sometimes how life offers us a pause that we *need*, even though we don't necessarily welcome it at the time. When we accept the interruption, and follow the energy that is calling us away, we often learn or experience something important that would otherwise not have occurred. Recognising pauses as *pauses* rather than annoying interruptions is an important part of the Art of Contemplation. Sometimes when we bat away a perceived disturbance, we are really closing the door to an unexpected moment of serendipity and good fortune. You may discover this for yourself the next time an unexpected pause surprises you.

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