

One Meditation

Richard Jewell



Welcome to this monthly meditation email and thanks for being here! Please consider sharing it with others who may find it helpful. Subjects range from modern to ancient, Western to Eastern, and scientific to spiritual. I began meditating in 1962 and have a couple of graduate degrees in religions. My hope is to offer news about--and comparisons of--meditation in a variety of cultures, times, and settings. – Richard

“TWO NATURE METAPHORS: OF WEEDS, SEEDS, & MEDITATION”

On my family’s farm, we dug weeds so we could produce good plants. We pulled or cut the bigger weeds by hand, and flipped out the little ones using a tractor-drawn implement. Most important, we sowed our seeds in dark, fertile soil. This month’s message is about weeds and seeds in the fields of good energy that already exist in meditation if a person but looks. One story comes from Hinduism’s classic yoga handbook, the other from Jesus of Nazareth.

The *Yoga Sutras*’ “Four Weeds”

The *Yoga Sutras* (c. 200 BCE-400 CE) helped Hindu yoga sweep across much of SE Asia. In four chapters, author Patanjali offers 196 brief chants or “sutras” for oral-tradition teachers and students to memorize. The goal he proposes in them is to develop the “clear mind.” In Sutra 2.4, he imagines meditators as farmers working in clarity and stillness in their spiritual fields to help healthy plants grow. But, he declares, four types of weeds invariably crop up ([*Yoga Sutras*](#)):

- (1) The obvious weeds “vigorously growing or opening”
- (2) Weeds that are “thin and weak, stretching up”
- (3) Unwanted plants “hoed but not yet rooted out”
- (4) Seeds “dormant, in the dark soil of sleep,” which may still grow.

These weeds, say the *Sutras*, keep us from a bountiful harvest. They range, respectively, from clinging too much to body life and old habits, to avoiding everything we dislike and building up our ego. But the real brilliance of the *Yoga Sutras* is that Patanjali does not write a long tract about handling each problem. Instead, he says simply, let the rich silence of your fertile soil expose the weeds, your attention cut them, and your sunlit clarity dry them.

This clarity is basic, for example, in Zen Buddhism and psychotherapy. Zen calls for mindfulness observation without reacting. “Psychotherapy,” says the National Institutes of Health, is “training” that helps patients “reflect and process...thoughts, emotions, and behaviors for an opportunity to adapt and absolve” ([National Library of Medicine, Oct. 6-24](#)). Your field of mind then can blossom increasingly with a more bountiful crop.

The Parable of the Sower

Jesus of Nazareth taught a similar story from a boat to a crowd on the shore. He proclaimed (Matthew 13.3-8, NIV):

Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!

In this parable, the meditator is a farmer planting a field. Where will the seeds burst with life? Not on the footpath where the birds eat the scattered seeds. Nor on rocky shallows where roots cannot dig. And not in the thorns (and high weeds) that shade young plants. Plant your seeds, instead, in sunny, fertile soil.

Part of the strength of these agricultural metaphors is that they describe spiritual life in several ways. But concerning the great ancient traditions of meditation, they apply two of inner life's steps: sow your seed in good soil; take care of your weeds. The result is a more fruitful harvest.

Next Month: "The 'Goddess' of Judaism and Christianity"

Peace, Strength, Joy

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"Meditation has two major definitions: (1) science says it is a conscious calming of the body and mind, and (2) experienced practitioners often define it as aware attention for the purpose of inner growth. Using these two meanings, the word covers most major spiritual practices. Mindfulness, too, say the Mayo Clinic and other scientists, is a type of meditating. All of these outer forms and more are linked by having, in common, very similar purposes and scientific results." – "One Meditation #1," Jan. 2025

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